

## Gardening Tips for Seniors

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Aging well means exercising the body and the mind. Gardening gives both. Get up, get dressed and get on with living. Here are my suggestions for fifty-plus seniors to help make gardening jobs easier as well as physically and mentally stimulating all year round.

### Getting Started:

The right amount of exercise for each person is an individual choice. Slow warm-up movements to stretch the body gently will help with elasticity and flexibility. If it hurts, don't do it.

**Hands:** Take advantage of new ergonomic tools that make gardening more pleasant for those of us with limited physical ability. New strong resin trowels are designed with angled handles and shaped to fit the palm of one's hand. This keeps the wrist straight and takes some of the strain off the finger muscles. Even a person with arthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome may keep using a trowel.

There are also soft durable tool grips that slide on the handles of beloved older tools to give better grip on wooden or cold metal handles. Better gardening gloves, some made of Kevlar, help keep a grip and keep the fingers warm when planting fall bulbs. They also help reduce the proliferation of age spots, which make our hands look ten years older than our actual age.



**Knees:** A single-seat kneeler is a light polyethylene stool that when turned upside down can be kneeled upon comfortably. The wide seat and proper leg length give extra support for getting up from kneeling to someone who has had hip or knee surgery.

**Save Energy:** With the fall season comes raking –getting the leaves to the compost pile. Use a lightweight bamboo or plastic adjustable rake to conserve energy. The tines expand from 7” to 23” so it can be used between perennials or on broad lawn areas.

If you use your leaves for mulch, do it the easy way. Pulverize them with the lawn mower and blow them onto the flowerbeds. Newer combination blower and vacuum shredders are carried with a shoulder sling.

Cordless electric models are quiet, easy to operate, and don't contribute to air pollution.

Ratchet anvil pruners and loppers have been in use for many years. They provide an easier method for cutting shrubs and small trees. One uses only the muscle power needed to cut a small branch, but the repeated action lets one cut much larger branches up to an inch thick.

There are also newer Japanese pruning saws with 12" blades and pistol grip handles that cut on both the pushes and pulls. These keep the wrist in the proper position to avoid worsening any carpal tunnel syndrome.

**Endurance:** The active senior may find lack of stamina a hindrance to performing a full day of gardening. Interval training is a way to cope with this problem. Try a half hour of stand-up cultivating, followed by an interval of kneeling planting and then an hour of pruning /deadheading.

**Rest/Reading:** Let us not forget the all-important rest time with a beverage nearby, the sound of birds at the birdbath and a selection of gardening magazines to peruse. Begin at the library for a broad selection of periodicals and books at every level of gardening interest. The latest information on seed catalogues, must-have plants, new tools and garden trends is only a library card away. Knowledge is power.

**Reassess/Redesign:** It may be time to reassess what we truly want from our gardening spaces. Perhaps sharing the large garden with a young family that wants a vegetable plot is the way to go for you. You could redesign the existing garden for super low maintenance and maximum safety. Enclose a deck to make a solarium greenhouse with heated benches. This will increase the viable gardening days to allow growing of winter salad greens and herbs all year long. When travel to more exotic climes loses its appeal, consider a "staycation." Enjoy your gardening hobby all year from your enclosed balcony or deck.

There is no time to get depressed when you have a garden. Those tender seedlings need your attention, the bougainvillea want misting and the sand in your Zen garden needs raking. Time to get to work on your own Shangri-La.

*Lake Simcoe South Master Gardeners provide free gardening advice.  
Send your questions to our gardening hotline at [lssmastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:lssmastergardeners@gmail.com)*