Gardening remains one of America’s favorite pastimes. According to the National Gardening Association, 83% of U.S. households participated in one or more types of do-it-yourself garden projects in 2005. Many of those who have arthritis may feel that they must give up this activity.

The term arthritis generally refers to over 100 diseases and conditions affecting the joints, surrounding and connective tissues, and causes pain, stiffness, and swelling. These conditions and diseases include lupus, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia, to name just a few. Arthritis is a leading cause of disability in the United States, where about 23% of adults (49 million) report that they have doctor-diagnosed arthritis. In Wisconsin, 27% of the adult population (approximately 1.1 million) report doctor-diagnosed arthritis. According to the Center for Disease Control, an aging population, expanding waistlines, and low levels of physical activity are likely to push the number of affected people up to 46% by 2030.

While arthritis cannot currently be cured, several factors can help to relieve the condition. These include: early diagnosis and treatment, physical activity, good nutrition, and appropriate self-management. Gardening is a great activity for maintaining physical activity and helping to improve nutrition. One study involving vegetable gardeners demonstrated “Gardeners generally consumed more vitamin-rich vegetables, ate a more balanced diet, and expended more calories in exercise than members of the comparison groups”. Increased fruit and vegetable consumption has been identified as a viable strategy for prevention of overweight and obesity, and diets rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer and other chronic diseases.

As with any other type of physical activity, gardeners should consult their physician regarding their specific condition. However, by working in moderation and utilizing some of the tools and techniques listed in this brochure, gardening can be enjoyed for many years to come.
Gardening and Arthritis

Moderation is the key! When gardening, pace yourself and take a 15 minute break each hour. Also, use assistive devices when you need them.

**TOOLS YOU ALREADY OWN**

You may already own tools which can be made more user friendly. The first thing is to make sure all of your tools are sharp. This not only includes tools such as pruning shears or hedge clippers, but other tools such as hoes and spades. Sharp edges will make tasks easier to perform and lessen fatigue.

The handles of tools can be cushioned by covering them with foam pipe insulation. This type of insulation is available at most hardware and home improvement stores. The material can easily be cut to length and then secured with electrical tape. This will reduce fatigue when gripping your hoe or rake.

A simple seeder can be made from 1" PVC pipe. This will allow you to place seeds precisely where you want them without the need to bend over.

**NEW TOOLS AVAILABLE**

There are a variety of tools on the market to assist you with various gardening tasks. If possible, you should try out any tools before you buy them to make sure that they fit your grip and are properly balanced. A few of the tools that we have tried are described in this brochure.

There are several varieties of kneeling benches to choose from. This particular one has a pad to protect your knees while kneeling to weed or transplant, as well as “handles” on the side to assist you when you stand up.

The bench can then be flipped over and used as a stool when you want to take a break from your gardening activities.

A variety of hand tools are also available. Some have telescoping handles to extend your reach. The tool shown in the photo has a vertical grip, plus forearm support. This is not only less tiring for your hand, but the forearm grip gives you additional leverage when digging or weeding.

**MOVING THE GARDEN TO YOU**

If you are unable to bend over to reach the garden, the next best thing is to move the garden closer to you. This can be accomplished by using raised beds, containers, or garden benches that a wheelchair can fit under.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

A presentation covering these and other techniques to make gardening easier can be viewed at: [http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/arthritis/](http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/arthritis/)