

Assessing Your Gardening Abilities

Agricultural Engineering Extension: Karen Funkenbusch, MA, University of Missouri-Columbia, Department of Occupational Therapy
School of Health Professions, in the School of Medicine: Diana Baldwin, MA, OTR/L, FAOTA

Consider how much time you have available to garden. This includes the amount of time it takes to reach your garden tools, equipment, water sources, as well as related garden tasks. When laying out your garden, plan ahead for the possibility of decreased mobility and strength. Your number one priority is your health, safety, and well being while gardening.

Assessing Your Gardening ABILITIES?

To determine if you need to change your gardening habits, ask yourself the following questions.

1. Can I can get down to the ground and up without assistance? Then ground level gardening may not present problems. Safety reminder: wear sunscreen, hat, and consider using kneepads or padded hand tools.
2. Can I use my arms to push up on objects or grab hold of objects to pull myself up from low surfaces? Consider raised beds, vertical gardens, containers, or trellis. Safety reminder: when gardening from a seated position, use sturdy seats with a large base and long handled garden tools.
3. Can I bend over and pick up objects from the ground? Eliminate or avoid stooping or bending activities. Safety reminder: To haul around tools be creative by using aprons, carts, buckets, suitcase on wheels, or even a golf bag.
4. Can I manage my current watering system? (If not, simplify process.) Safety reminder: keep hoses, sprinklers, watering wands in clear sight to avoid falls, tripping, or entanglement.
5. Can I stand on one foot without it challenging my balance? Eliminate or avoid stooping, bending, and overhead gardening activities. Safety reminder: think about lowering overhead surfaces.
6. Can I walk without assistance or an assistive device; or use a wheelchair?

Raise your garden surfaces to a comfortable level and reevaluate garden pathways. Safety reminder: bring garden area, tool storage, work surface, and watering source closer together. Also, reduce inclines where possible, add additional areas for seating, and pathways should be wide enough for the gardener and another person to get around.

For additional information contact your local Outreach and Extension Service or the University of Missouri-Columbia, 1.800.995.8503.

This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), U. S. Department of Agriculture under special project number 2001-41590-01143 and the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research under special project number H133B980022.

University Outreach and Extension does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability or status as a Vietnam-era veteran in employment or programs.

