

# Safety Tips to Make Gardening Easier on Your Body

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Spring is definitely around the corner! The days are getting longer, the birds are chirping happily at the crack of dawn, and the buds on the trees are starting to peek out. Soon, those of us who like to garden will be out raking, digging, lifting, and nursing sore muscles.

Remember, muscle soreness normally doesn't kick in until 24-48 hours after a strenuous activity. This is called Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS). By this time it is already too late to take back overdoing an activity. Common sense and a little planning ahead can prevent pain or injuries from even happening. Just a reminder to use a little common sense to ease muscle soreness, prevent heat exhaustion and perhaps even prevent worse injuries, such as back strains or neck and shoulder pain.

1. Drink plenty of water or non-carbonated drinks, such as lemonade or iced green tea. Try to drink at least 2-3 glasses before you even go out to work in the yard. Avoid alcohol until you are fully hydrated and out of the heat. Hydration helps muscle tissues flush out the toxins that make us sore. They also keep the rest of our body chemistry in balance, including body temperature.
2. Warm-up, just as you would before strenuous exercise-because gardening is strenuous exercise! Take the dog for a 5-10 minute walk, or dance to music for 5-10 minutes before gardening. Any activity that warms up the muscles.
3. Think before you lift. If you're about to lift a heavy planter or bag of mulch, stop to think about your back. Get close to the item, squat down, get a good grasp and lift with your knees. Do not bend at the waist with straight knees or you will torque your low back.
4. Interval hard work between easier jobs to evenly space strenuous work. This is especially important if you are already dealing with a chronic pain, arthritis, or injury. Many people like to just get it all done, then the next day they are so stiff and sore that they can't function.
5. Take a little Ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory medication. If you don't like what these medications do to your stomach, try a more natural herbal remedy called Arnica Montana. Arnica can be taken to prevent or decrease muscle soreness. It can also be taken to lessen the likelihood of heat exhaustion or bruising after trauma to any part of the body. It's dissolved under the tongue, so it doesn't irritate the stomach like NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs).
6. Use sunscreen, SPF 30 or higher is ideal to protect your skin from damaging rays.

There are also things you can do afterwards for damage control. Ice applied to the sore area for 20 minutes on/ 20 minutes off will lessen soreness or bruising in the first 24-48 hours after a strenuous activity, or trauma. A bag of peas in a pillowcase works great for this because it molds to your body. Taking an herbal remedy called Arnica Montana works great in preventing or lessening muscle soreness, bruising from any trauma, and decreasing the chance for heat exhaustion. It can be found in health food stores, online, or even in the natural foods isle of some of the big-name grocery stores. One great place in Minneapolis is called Present Moment Herbs and Books. Their people are very helpful and they even have a website to order items online. [www.presentmoment.com](http://www.presentmoment.com).