

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Grow A Garden of Wellness

Spring is here! In celebration of this green season, Dr. Smith encourages patients to dust off their green thumbs. What does gardening have to do with obtaining optimal health? Read on to find out.

Green Workouts

As a preventive health-care specialist, Dr. Smith motivates patients to engage in regular physical activity. However, sticking to an exercise routine can be tedious. That's why Dr. Smith emphasizes the importance of choosing enjoyable activities. And, scientific studies support this recommendation. Research shows that people who find exercise pleasurable are significantly more likely to work out regularly and less likely to experience injury.

It may seem like common sense to choose an exercise regimen you enjoy. However, many people feel obligated to participate in "traditional" workouts, such as jogging and health-club visits. Those who find these activities

boring or tedious often fail to maintain a consistent workout schedule. So, if "traditional" workouts aren't for you, consider more creative endeavors, such as gardening.

Reports indicate that gardening is a viable form of exercise. Pulling weeds, planting seedlings or hoeing a plot for an hour each day can significantly boost your level of wellness.

One study found low-intensity activities, including gardening, can prevent cardiovascular disease and extend an individual's life span (*Lancet* 1998;351:1603-08). Another report indicates that people who garden are less likely to endure injuries (*Journal of American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons* 2000;8:37-44).



Upgrade Your Diet

Gardening can also improve your health by boosting the quality of your diet. Availability is key to choosing nutritious foods. And what could be more available than produce picked in your backyard?

Power Veggies

In general, homegrown fruits, vegetables and herbs are more nutrient-dense than store-bought items. Some commercial farming techniques reduce the vitamins and minerals in produce. In addition, produce from your garden is fresher than store-bought varieties. And studies reveal that the longer a produce item sits after it is picked, the more nutrients it loses.

Natural Remedies

Spring into spring by planting your own natural medicine chest. Many herbs commonly found in backyard plots have medicinal properties. For example, ginger and spearmint are effective remedies for stomach, nausea and motion sickness.



Steven L. Smith, DC, Hickory Chiropractic Clinic, PLLC
256 Third Avenue NW, Hickory, NC 28601 (828) 323-8998
www.hickorychiro.com contact@hickorychiro.com

Rosemary is considered by herbalists to boost memory, while garlic is a natural antibiotic and anti-fungal agent. Basil is a nontoxic insect repellent while thyme is a natural expectorant believed to relieve migraines. Dill is thought to quell indigestion. Ongoing research also indicated that many herbs contain potent chemicals, called phytochemicals, which prevent cancer and heart disease.

Family Fun

Having trouble motivating your children to eat veggies? Try making gardening a family affair. Kids who turn up their noses at store-bought produce will devour foods they help grow. And an afternoon spent gardening can be a fun family project. After all, kids of all ages love to play in the dirt.

Gardening Options for Apartment Dwellers

If your home lacks a yard, look into community plots. You may also offer to care for a garden on a friend's property, and share the fruits of your labor with your host. Or, volunteer at one of many organic farms that donate produce to homeless shelters.



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Gardening the Natural Way

As doctors who focus on preventative health care, chiropractors support organic gardening techniques, since some commercial fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides may contain chemicals linked with cancer, asthma and other diseases (*Cancer* 1999; 85:1353-60). Here are some all-natural gardening tips that will help your plants flourish:

Test your soil, especially if you plan to eat what you grow. Many universities with agricultural programs offer this service at low cost. The testing service should alert you to the presence of dangerous chemicals, and advise you if your soil is a safe home for growing produce. If you are concerned about the quality of your soil, consider planting in large pots filled with organic soil purchased at a garden supply store.

Brew your own pesticides by blending cayenne pepper, garlic and water. Spray the concoction on infested plants.

Turn to plant-friendly bugs to rid your garden of harmful pests, rather than relying on toxic chemicals. Green lacewings are critters that eat the eggs of destructive insects, such as mites, aphids and mealybugs — while leaving your precious plants alone. Lady beetles also munch on aphids, while nematodes are a natural solution to June beetles. Most garden supply stores stock the larvae of garden-friendly bugs.

Make your own compost with leaves, leftover vegetables, fruit peels, coffee grounds and eggshells. Look for compost containers at your local garden supply store.

Start seedlings in split eggshells housed in an egg container.

Keep your garden free of weeds, which will steal water and nutrients from your crops.

Choose plants native to your geographical region. Indigenous plants develop a natural resistance to local pest, soil and climate changes.

Maintain moisture and repel soil-borne disease by adding organic mulch to dirt surrounding plants. Make your own nutrient-rich mulch with grass clippings, straw, shredded bark or pine needles.

Trap snails and slugs in shallow containers of beer placed around your garden.