

# The Gardener's Workout

Dislike gyms but love to garden? Want to build strength or lose weight in the comfort of your own backyard? Then training in your garden may be for you! Like any moderate exercise, yard work can be beneficial. Recent studies suggest that daily gardening can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, improve bone density and help prevent glucose intolerance.

Use these suggestions from Kim Ruby, a personal trainer in Los Angeles. Ruby developed a garden workout for client Jolene Dodson, who is now writing *The Garden Workout* (Andrews McMeel Publishing). Try these gardening "moves" below and have fun! (See "The Program" for tips on designing a complete workout).

## 1. Easy Activities

The following activities are appropriate for most people.

**Fertilizing.** Walk around the garden sprinkling fertilizer or adding compost.

**Mowing.** Groom the entire lawn with a manual mower.

**Raking.** Rake leaves and yard clippings.

**Easy Weeding.** With a rake-like movement, use a hoe to dig up weeds.

## 2. Moderate Activities

These movements require more strength, flexibility or balance and may not be appropriate if you're an older adult or beginning exerciser.

**Aerating the Lawn.** Put aerating sandals on over shoes and walk around the entire lawn.

**Overhead Harvesting and Pruning.** To harvest, reach overhead and pick fruit off the trees. To prune, firmly grasp pruners, reach overhead and prune selected branches. Use a ladder in both cases, if necessary. Beware of falling debris!

## THE PROGRAM

What type of exercise does your body need? The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends 20 to 60 minutes of continuous or intermittent aerobic activity 3 to 5 days per week, at not less than 55 percent, and not more than 90 percent, of maximum heart rate (MHR). (To calculate your MHR, subtract your age from 220.) ACSM also recommends stretching the major muscle groups on at least 2 or 3 days per week.

For resistance training, ACSM recommends exercising 8 to 10 major muscle groups 2 to 3 days per week. The guidelines suggest one set of 8 to 12 repetitions per workout if you're younger than 50 or one set of 10 to 15 reps if you're 50 or older. While gardening activities work all major muscle groups, they don't fall neatly into sets and reps. If you need assistance designing a workout, contact a personal trainer. (See [www.ideafit.com](http://www.ideafit.com) for trainers in your area.)

A sample workout: Start with at least 20 minutes of walking, either in the yard or around the neighborhood. Then do some of the easy and moderate activities described in this article and gradually add more challenging ones as you get stronger. Follow your workout with 10 minutes of stretching.

To prepare a training schedule, make a list of gardening chores for the month. Schedule the tasks on a calendar, distributing them throughout the month. Combine easy activities with more challenging ones on the same day. When planning, also note which muscle groups each activity uses and mix and match tasks accordingly. Prepare a new schedule for each month the weather lets you work in the garden.

## 3. Challenging Activities

Gradually introduce these activities into your workout as you get fitter.

**Weeding "The Hard Way."** Bend knees into a deep squatting position and pull up weeds. Weed the entire garden, standing when necessary. (Place a block or low stool under your hips if you need one.) To prepare for this movement during the gardening "offseason," do squats, low-back stretches and quadriceps stretches.

**Digging.** Holding a shovel, stand in a lunge position, with left foot in front of right. Stick the shovel into the dirt and push it down with your left foot. Pick up dirt with the shovel and toss it into an appropriate pile. Switch sides periodically. In the offseason, do front shoulder raises and side throws with a medicine ball.

**Cleanup and General Hauling.** Stand

with feet slightly apart. Bend your knees and reach down to pick up debris. Use the quadriceps and gluteals to straighten your legs. Carry debris to an appropriate container. In the offseason, do squats, dead lifts, rows and biceps curls. ♦

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