

## Gardening with Arthritis: Using Universal Design in the Garden

### Good work habits

- Work during the coolest time of the day – medication can cause sensitivity to heat or sun
- Drink water! Medications can increase risk of dehydration
- Switch tasks often, going from bending jobs to reaching jobs, switch which hands you use, and limit time spent doing tasks that require gripping, squeezing and grasping
- Poor posture can lead to pain, fatigue, and strains - avoid sitting slouched over while working, and don't rest your weight on one leg or one arm while you work
- Respect pain - Pain is the body's warning sign. When gardening causes pain, **STOP**

### Protect your hands, elbows, shoulders and wrists

- Keep wrist and hands in neutral position instead of twisting
- Use grippy gloves to hold tools without exerting your hands and wrists
- Minimize working with your hands above your shoulders, Try to limit lifting, reaching and pulling

### Protect your back, knees and feet

- When changing directions, turn with feet, not at waist, to avoid a twisting motion
- Wear comfortable and supportive shoes with a good tread
- Carry items close to your body, make more trips with smaller loads

### Ergonomic tools are designed to keep the body in a neutral position

- Made with large, soft handles for a better grip on the tool
- Curved to fit the natural contour of the hand
- Long handled tools minimize the need to reach or stoop
- Use tools with "spring action design" to reduce hand strain

### DIY Ergonomic tool options:

- Wrap pipe insulation around handles to make them thicker and softer
- Use PVC pipe to extend and/or contour tool handles - secure your DIY upgrades with duct tape
- Bright colored (or glow in the dark) paint or tape on tool handles

### Solutions for equipment and supply storage

- Put heavy items on shelves the height of your cart for easy transfer of supplies
- Rolling work seats often have some storage capacity
- Use carts and wheelbarrows to haul heavy tools, supplies and plants

### Tips for choosing the right cart or wheelbarrow

- Look for carts or wheelbarrows with removable back or front panels, and two or more wheels to provide stability and balance
- Consider the weight of the cart & the supplies you will be hauling

**Universal Design** is the creation of products and environments meant to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without need for adaptation or specialization

**Benefits of using Universal Design in your garden:**

- Increase efficiency and ease of use
- Provide a safer place to garden

**Ideas for using Universal Design in your Garden**

- Lever style door handles, gate handles, and water faucets, wide doors and gates
- Smooth transitions at entrances (no steps or barriers), smooth pathways between garden rows, limit changes in elevation
- Clearly defined pathways and garden rows, motion sensor lights and well lit work areas
- Soaker hoses or in ground irrigation system
- Store supplies & equipment in or near the garden

**Container gardens** can be placed anywhere, in any size space, and can be set at any height

- Wood pallet gardens, window boxes, wall hanging gardens
- Planting bags, hanging baskets, planting towers

**Raised garden beds** are accessible to people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, those who can't bend or kneel, and those who can't stoop or bend over a garden bed

- Raised beds should be 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' to 3' high, with leg room, and a depth of 2' – 3'
- You should be able to reach the back of the bed while seated or standing

**Planning your garden for next year**

- Irrigation system or soaker hoses
- Perennials and easy to care for plants
- In-garden storage
- Invite neighbors to help in the garden

**Fact Sheets** available  
for a variety of topics:  
**Go to [agrability.osu.edu](http://agrability.osu.edu)**  
Click the **Resources** tab  
Select **Fact Sheets**

**Topics include**  
Farm family resources  
Physical limitations  
Health related conditions  
Injury prevention

The **Ag S.T.A.T.** (Safe Tactics for Ag Today) newsletter  
has articles on Safety & Health:  
**Go to [agsafety.osu.edu](http://agsafety.osu.edu)**  
Click the **Resources Tab**  
Select **Ag Safety S.T.A.T.**

**Topics include**

- Safety Resource Spotlight
- Ohio AgrAbility
- Injury Prevention
- Emergency Management

The Ohio State University has partnered with Easter Seals of Greater Cincinnati to serve Ohio's agricultural residents impacted by a disability, by providing training, technical assistance, and becoming a primary source of information directly to the farmer. Ohio AgrAbility has begun working with OSU Extension's Master Gardener Volunteers to educate gardeners about working in the garden with arthritis, and preventing secondary injuries.

