

## What are the physical and mental benefits of gardening?

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Gardening can reduce stress and mental clarity while also helping to prevent everything from coronary disease to colon cancer.



Gardening can reduce stress and mental clarity while also helping to prevent everything from coronary disease to colon cancer. Photo credit: Michelle Lavra | MSU Extension

Nature has long been known for its relaxing qualities, as a place for humans to find tranquility and healing. Gardening in particular is associated with mental clarity and feelings of reward, and it has many physical benefits as well. Food gardening can particularly be gratifying and an excellent source of fresh produce. From soil preparation to the joy of harvesting, there is always a task, big or small, during the growing season! If you have ever spent a summer gardening, you know that these tasks can serve as great exercise. With many community leaders in Michigan, such as Michigan State University Extension, working to promote private gardens as well as urban agriculture opportunities such as community gardens, there has never been a better time to use gardening for exercise. But just how beneficial to your health is this age-old agricultural tradition?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), moderate-intensity level activity for 2.5 hours each week can reduce the risk for obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke, depression, colon cancer and premature death. The CDC considers gardening a moderate-intensity level activity, and can help you to achieve that 2.5 hour goal each week. Additionally, those that choose gardening as their moderate-intensity exercise are more likely to exercise 40-50 minutes longer on average than those that choose activities like walking or biking. By venturing outdoors to various community garden spaces around Michigan, you not only assist in keeping their community vibrant, but become healthier in the process. For example:

- “A ten percent increase in nearby green space was found to decrease a person’s health complaints in an amount equivalent to a five year reduction in that person’s age” according to the Gardening Matters nonprofit of Minneapolis’ page, “Multiple Benefits of Community Gardens.”
- Exercising both the arms and legs is recommended to help prevent illnesses like coronary disease. With most everyday activities only involving the arms, gardening is a great way to incorporate the entire body while exercising.

Gardening has also emerged in recent years as a scientifically proven stress reliever. Stress can cause irritability, headaches, stomach aches, heart attacks and worsen pre-existing conditions in the body. An experiment published in the Journal of Health Psychology compared gardening to reading as a stress-relieving activity; test subjects that gardened experienced a more significant decrease in stress when compared to the subjects that were assigned to read.

In addition to health benefits, gardens are also known to increase property values and save money when grocery shopping. With so many options and resources for both community and personal garden development available in Michigan there is no reason not to enjoy the outdoors this season by growing a vibrant, beneficial garden and getting your exercise in the process!

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