

## Work Out with Yard Work

### ***Your Yard & Your Body Will Thank You!***

*-- By Liz Noelcke, Staff Writer*

Ask anyone who has spread mulch in their yard, and they'll tell you that yard work is quite the workout! Whether hauling mulch, spreading soil, raking leaves, or pulling weeds, you're guaranteed to break a sweat. That's because gardening works all your major muscle groups. Even something as simple as planting flowers involves squatting, which engages your legs for support, your core muscles for balance, and your arms and shoulders for digging.

That's just one example of how working outside can give you a workout! As the spring weather rolls in, it's the perfect time to get outside and garden—you'll transform your yard and your body (by burning extra calories and working those muscles).

By using the outdoors as your own personal gym you'll rake-in the benefits! Fresh air is always uplifting, especially in the springtime. Being outside is a great way to relieve stress and relax. Plus, sunshine helps boost Vitamin D production, which aids in the absorption of calcium.

Heavy yard work is a great way to add variation to your regular exercise program, while light gardening can be great for exercise beginners. If you do yard work as a way to burn calories, take full advantage of what the great outdoors have to offer:

- Use a push mower instead of a riding tractor. This adds intensity so that you're working harder, elevating that heart rate, and burning more calories.
- If you are raking up leaves, change the movement and direction to make full use of your muscles. Rake in front of your body to target your shoulders. Rake both right to left and left to right to work both arms evenly. This way, you'll help prevent blisters by avoiding repetitive motions too.
- If you're using a wheelbarrow to haul yard waste, soil, or mulch, take an extra loop or two around your garden before you set your goods down.
- When digging, switch back and forth between hands so that you are utilizing both arms.
- Instead of using a small watering can, heave the heavy hose around the yard with you. You'll also have to use those muscles to put it away and wind it up when you're done.

You may have experienced some aching muscles after working outside in the past, but there are actually several things you can do to prevent this soreness while still enjoying the outdoors:

- Yard work utilizes your major muscle groups just like any workout. So, always warm up first by simply taking a short walk around your yard or down the block to get the blood flowing to your muscles.
- Then, try some light stretches for your hamstrings and lower back (especially if you'll be doing a lot of bending).
- It's a good idea to take a few breaks throughout the day to drink some extra water and do some additional stretching.

As an active gardener, you can grow your own fresh fruits and vegetables! Ask your local gardening center about setting up a pot for tomato vines or green peppers. There is nothing better than fresh, homegrown produce to motivate you to eat healthier.

Grow! Enjoy the outdoors. Weed, mulch, dig and rake. Try all of these activities, get your hands in the dirt, and include yard work as a part of your healthy lifestyle.