

## Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

### Preventing gardening injuries

Photos Cynthia Brian



Gather the self-harvested guavas to make jams, jellies, juice, or enjoy sauteed.



Mission figs are harvested through November.



A formal garden of boxwood parterres and artichoke plants is decorated with pumpkins.



Dahlias of many colors brighten the garden.

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4. Wear protective eye gear when operating any mechanical tool such as a chainsaw, weed eater, lawn mower, blower, or other machines.
5. Before jumping into a big task, warm your body up with a brisk walk, jumping jacks,

stretching, dancing, or gentle movements. When you have completed your gardening tasks for the day, perform simple stretches for five minutes.

6. Carry a bottle of water with you. Rehydrate often. It's very easy to get dehydrated while gardening, especially on a hot day. Dehydration puts extra pressure on the cardiovascular system and can be fatal.

7. Use the correct tools for each task to prevent injuries.

8. Protect your knees with a cushion or knee pads. An old pillow that is washable works well for me. Move the pillow close to where you will be working so as not to stretch your torso.

9. Minimize repetitive movements that put stress on one area of your body. Take a short break every 15 minutes. Stand, stretch, sit, relax, drink water, and breathe.

10. Avoid BLT as much as possible.

a. Bending: Instead of bending over to weed, sit on a stool or a bucket. Keep your back straight while you lean forward to pull weeds. Don't twist to the side. Always move as close to an area that you want to clean as possible.

b. Lifting: Protect your back by using your legs and hips. Stand close to the object you are lifting and spread your legs widely for added support. Keep your back straight. Bend with your knees, not your waist, and tense your stomach muscles as you lift. Use your core strength. Don't bend forward as you lift. Use your knees and hips to do the lifting.

c. Twisting: When sweeping, digging, raking, shoveling, and other chores that require using a long-handled object, minimize the strain to

your back by keeping your posture aligned with the object. Don't turn to the side or twist in any direction as that increases the strain on your back, shoulders, and neck. Pivot your feet when necessary and keep your body parts moving in the same direction.

11. Listen to your body. Our bodies are wondrous miracles that usually warn us when we are overusing a muscle or doing too much. It's natural to be a bit sore after a day of intense gardening. Know your limits and don't go past them. If painful symptoms persist or get worse, consult your physician.

12. Remember tomorrow is another day. You don't have to do everything on your "to-do" list in one interval. Gardening is a marathon that we can never outrun. Gardening requires patience. Spread tasks out over several days.

Gardening is therapeutic but can also be dangerous when precautionary measures are not followed. Be extra careful when using a ladder. Hire a professional to assist with tasks that you can no longer perform. Ask for help when needed.

One of my favorite stories in my book, "Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul" chronicled a couple in their 70s who loved to garden but because of weakened muscular systems embraced Chuck Yeager's quote. One morning when the wife spotted her husband lying flat on his stomach under an apple tree, she scurried to help. On closer inspection, she saw he had a trowel in his hand. Exasperated, she yelled, "What are you doing?" The husband replied, "The next best thing!"

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