

April: Gear up for Gardening!

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Gardeners know, and research shows, that cultivating plants is beneficial for us. Gardening has been associated with improvements in attitudes



toward health and nutrition, better school performance for kids, and community spirit. Every April communities, groups, and individuals celebrate National Garden Month.

Gardening can be a great way to enjoy being outside, get exercise, enhance the community, and grow fruits and vegetables.

Benefits of Gardening and Safety Tips:

Fruits and vegetables - more matters. Gardens can motivate children to try new fruits and vegetables, and kids are eager to taste the 'fruits' of



their labor. Fruits and vegetables are an important source of vitamins and minerals, provide fiber, color and texture, and may reduce

disease risk, but few children or adults eat recommended amounts. Gardening with your kids will get them excited about the plants on their plate.

Increase physical activity. Doing light gardening/yard work for approximately 30-60 minutes can burn anywhere from 165 to 330 calories, according to ChooseMyPlate.gov. Light gardening/yard work



is considered moderate physical activity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest gardening as a way to get some of the 2 ½ hours of recommended weekly activity. If you have been inactive, start out gradually

each day, building up time and intensity. Vary your gardening activities to keep it fun and broaden the benefits.

Grow a successful garden. According to the National Gardening Association, the best way to



launch a successful garden is to start small and choose varieties that do well in your area. You might start with vegetables your children already enjoy, or try selecting plants around a theme such as a rainbow

garden to increase their interest.

Gear up for gardening with safety. Wear safety goggles, sturdy shoes, and long pants when using



lawn mowers or other machinery. Wear gloves to lower the risk for skin irritations, cuts, and certain contaminants and protect your hearing when using loud machinery. Lower your risk for sunburn by wearing long sleeves,

wide-brimmed hats, sun shades, and sunscreen.

Stay hydrated. As the gardening season progresses, it's important to be smart about



staying hydrated when temperatures are on the rise. Drink plenty of water throughout the day to replace lost fluids. Sipping throughout the day is better than saving up for meals or breaks.

Take breaks. Take breaks often and rest in shaded areas so your body's



thermostat will have a chance to recover. Stop working if you experience breathlessness or muscle soreness. Signs of heat-related illness include extremely high body temperature, headache, rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea, confusion, or unconsciousness.

Gardening can have a positive impact on eating habits, physical activity level, and overall well-being. Whether you are a beginner or expert gardener, health and safety are always important. Nebraska Extension has lots of resources on gardening from the Nebraska Master Gardener Program, growing local foods, Backyard Farmer, and how to cook with fresh herbs. For more information and resources related to gardening, check out the following from Nebraska Extension for the home, community, and greenhouse:



- <http://food.unl.edu/home-gardening>
- <http://food.unl.edu/community-gardening>
- <http://food.unl.edu/greenhouse-hoophouses>

Additional Resources & Links:

- **Nebraska Master Gardener Program.** The Nebraska Master Gardener program extends the outreach of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) by providing volunteers with research-based horticulture education, which prepares them to share their knowledge with the citizens of the State. Check out how to become a Master Gardener at: <http://mastergardener.unl.edu/become-a-master-gardener>
- **Urban Agriculture - Growing Local Foods.** Urban agriculture is the practice of producing food within or surrounding an urban area: Farms (large and small), community gardens, and backyard gardens. Get started gardening, preparing and preserving food. <http://food.unl.edu/local-food-production>
- **Backyard Farmer.** The televised version of Backyard Farmer has been on the air, each April to September, since 1953. The panel provides research-based answers to gardening questions about insect pests, fruits and vegetables, turf to landscape design and much more. Check out all it has to offer at: <http://byf.unl.edu/>

- **Healthy Cooking with Fresh Herbs.** Change the taste and appearance of your foods from "ordinary" to "extraordinary" by adding fresh herbs with tips at: <http://food.unl.edu/free-fresh-herbs-powerpoint-and-handout>
- **Growing and Preparing Loose Leaf Lettuce.** Loose leaf lettuce is one of the simplest lettuces to grow in home gardens and the type grown by most home gardeners. You just plant it, water it, harvest it, and eat it! Loose leaf lettuce varieties are those lettuces that do not form a compact head. Their flavor tends to be mild and sweet. <http://food.unl.edu/growing-and-preparing-loose-leaf-lettuce>

Sources:

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- National Gardening Association. About National Garden Month. 2017. <http://www.nationalgardenmonth.org/about/>

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