



## Plant two rows of peas and call me in the morning

*Gardening benefits your health in more ways than one!*

**G**ARDENING IS A LOT MORE than just a hobby or a way to have fresh vegetables. Research is showing that gardening is an ideal form of exercise for your mind, body, and spirit. And it's a great activity for your children to get involved in.

### For Your Mind

Gardening is an excellent means of diverting the mind from work, family conflicts, or other issues, hence relieving stress and providing mental relaxation. As you weed and tend your plants, you can feel tension and anxiety fade. Your mood improves and you may become more mentally alert. Gardening is a relaxing activity, great for unwinding after a difficult day at the office.

### For Your Body

Gardening provides a challenging and beneficial workout, but it isn't as stressful to the body as other exercise options. It incorporates many important elements of exercise regimes—stretching and stance, repetition and movement, and even resistance similar to weight training—all while burning calories.

Before gardening, it is still important to warm up muscle groups by properly stretching, and it's imperative to use proper techniques for lifting, bending, or carrying. With gardening, unlike many exercise options, you can become involved in what you are doing and still take time to “smell the roses.”

A recent study by Barbara Ainsworth and Associates found that an individual expends as much energy performing some gardening tasks as participating in recommended exercise routines. Because it can help lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, gardening reduces your risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. It can also help maintain muscle strength, joint flexibility, and weight control.

There's even more good news for green thumbs. According to a 2000 University of Arkansas study that compared many forms of exercise, yard work may help prevent osteoporosis in women age 50 and older. Researchers compared yard work to bicycling, aerobics, dancing, and weight training. Yard work and weight training were the only two activities shown to be significant for maintaining healthy bone mass.

### For Your Spirit

In the course of creating a garden and cultivating plants, you take part in the cycles of nature. This process can offer a spiritual dimension to your day, a sense of accomplishment and beauty as your plants flourish. Keeping plants in good

health satisfies the human instinct to nurture and provide care. Gardeners are rewarded for their efforts when the plants they have pampered flower and produce beautiful fruit or healthy vegetables.

### For Your Children

Do you remember your first plant? Your first garden? Perhaps it was a lima bean you planted in a plastic cup as part of a class project. Perhaps it was your own corner of your parent's garden, partitioned off just for the plants you chose.

Most kids love to dig and play in the dirt. While you will likely not want your kids digging holes in your lawn or in established areas of the garden, you can let them dig in new beds before you have planted anything. Or designate a part of the garden that is just for your child.

Getting your children interested in gardening not only keeps them occupied while you're at work in the garden, it gets them outside and teaches them about nature. If children's first gardening experiences are fun and successful, chances are good that they'll develop a green thumb that will stay with them for life. You may also find that learning about vegetables will lead them to healthier eating habits.

Even if you have never gardened before, take a deep breath, pull on some gardening gloves, and get started. Better yet, get the whole family involved—families that garden together grow together. ♦