



Gardening is healthy for people of all ages

When most people think about their garden, they think about the fresh vegetables they will be eating all summer. The vegetables are packed with good nutrients, but the garden provides many other benefits as well. Growing a garden provides your body with a good physical workout. Make gardening a family affair and all will harvest the benefits.

“Digging in the dirt is just plain fun for little children. Why not give them some seeds to put in that dirt to see what they can produce?” said Tammy Roberts, nutrition and health education specialist with MU Extension. If a child has grown and harvested their own food, they are much more likely to eat it. Also, learning to use small garden tools can be good for the development of gross and fine motor skills for children.

When we think about planning and caring for the garden, we are usually thinking about the healthful benefits of the food. Make no mistake; while you are paying attention to the chore at hand, your body is benefitting from a good workout as well.

“Did you know you are actually doing some strength training exercises while you work in the garden? Next time you are carrying a watering bucket or large flower pot just think about how that can help your muscles,” said Roberts. Maintaining muscle mass is an important part of assuring good flexibility and balance. And when you are bone tired from getting up and down, know that you have actually helped your bones. The slow movement of getting from a sitting to a standing position is good for maintaining your muscles and bones.

Gardening is also very good for the mind. Children can learn many science lessons in the garden from the benefits of some bugs to how compost is made and helps the garden grow. Adults exercise their brain power in many ways, such as researching new plants they want to grow, finding the best method to manage pests and learning how to irrigate the garden.

Gardening is good for the mind in another way – it can boost your mood. You can go to the garden in a rotten mood, but it’s pretty hard to leave the same way, especially if you are carrying your first red ripe tomato!