

GROWING A GARDEN TOGETHER – A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES OF OLDER ADULTS

Gardening can be a wonderful activity for older adults with Alzheimer's or other memory disorders and their families. Whether you and your parent have earned green thumbs after years of tilling the soil or are looking for a pleasant new activity you can enjoy together, nothing quite beats working in the garden.

According to experts who diagnose and treat memory disorders, gardening activities often have a positive effect on an older person's physical, mental and emotional health. An afternoon of fresh air and sunshine in the garden will improve your older relative's appetite and help him or her sleep better at night.

As new plants begin to grow and bloom you can both take pride in your garden and enjoy the flowers, fruits and vegetables you grew yourselves.

PLANNING THE GARDEN

If both are new to gardening, your state or county cooperative extension service office can provide you with lots of useful information about soil conditions, common garden pests, the best times to plant or harvest fruit, flowers or vegetables in your area. Some extension services have Master Gardeners -- specially trained volunteers who can answer your questions about plants and gardening by phone at no cost. Garden centers and nurseries are also good sources of home horticulture information.

Choose a small plot with good soil that's close to the house and has an outdoor faucet nearby so it's easy to water your plants. Store garden tools and supplies close to the garden or tote equipment around the yard in a garden cart or child's wagon. If your parent uses a wheelchair, tools can be toted in a bag or basket on the back of the chair.

Consider container gardening if your older relative can no longer care for a big garden or lives in an apartment or assisted living facility. Bulbs, seeds and cuttings from other plants can be grown in window boxes, flower pots, cans, large clay pots, or other interesting containers. Flower pots dry out quickly especially in hot weather and need frequent watering so choose hardy plants that grow well in dry soils.

CARING FOR THE GARDENERS

Plan what you and your parent want to accomplish before beginning the day's gardening project but don't hesitate to stop before the tasks are completed. Some jobs are much more strenuous than you anticipated.

Apply sunscreen or wear a hat to avoid sunburn. Break big chores into smaller tasks to prevent possible injuries or fatigue. Take frequent "time outs" to sit quietly, enjoy the fresh air and sunshine, sip some water, eat a snack and watch the birds, bees, bugs, worms, butterflies and other garden visitors.

ENJOYING YOUR GARDEN

Gardening is a good way to spend time with an older relative. He or she can share gardening experiences and provide you with lots of tips about growing flowers, plants and herbs.

If you both are new to this wonderful pastime you'll have the pleasure of learning together about plants and plant care, how to prepare and maintain a garden, experimenting with various plants and overcoming the many challenges gardeners face – bugs, groundhogs and other critters, too much or too little rain -- and learning which plants work best in your environment.

In the fall when th garden is put to bed for the winter you can both look forward to the arrival of seed and plant catalogs in the spring!

***Gardening is medicine that does not need
a prescription ... And with no limit on dosage. (anon)***

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