

Getting back into gardening By Dr. Wes Dawkins

With the snow melting away and the warm weather right around the corner many green thumbs are excited to get outside and get their gardens growing. Enjoying the outdoors and getting a little exercise in the process can be a great way to get in shape. But be careful not to do too much too soon, especially if you've been sedentary over the winter months.

Here is a quick list of tips that will help keep the aches and pains at bay while keeping your garden beautiful:

Warm up – don't start by lifting the heavy bag of topsoil. Start with some of your lighter work so your muscles can warm up before doing that heavy lifting.

Lift correctly – keep you back straight, use your powerful leg muscles and keep the load close to your body. If at all possible, split the heavy load into several smaller ones.

Take breaks and alternate between light and heavy – mix up when you do heavy work and light work. Giving your body a little break in between heavy jobs can make a huge difference.

Kneel to plant – this takes the strain off your back and hips. Using knee pads or a kneeling pad will take some pressure off your knees as well.

Change your position often – this will keep you from overstraining any one spot on your body.

Use the right tools – a hose is preferable to a watering can, a wheelbarrow makes moving heavy loads a breeze, and ergonomic lightweight long handled tools are a must.

Most importantly, ease into it. Overdoing it is the most common mistake people make. Start with a few hours and see how you feel over the next few days. Sore muscles often take some time to show up.

Following these tips should make for a pain free start to the gardening season. If you do strain something and the pain last for more than 48 hours seek some care from a health care professional. Don't let aches and pains keep you out of the garden.

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