

Gardening:

A fun, healthy activity for the whole family that's easier than you think.



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Why Gardening?

“The glory of gardening:
hands in the dirt, head in the sun,
heart with nature. To nurture a garden
is to feed not just the body, but the soul.”

Alfred Austin, poet

It's no secret that gardening is among the top hobbies enjoyed by many in the region and around the country. More and more, you see people getting back-to-basics and planting vegetable and herb gardens. You hear about community gardens, rooftop gardens, organic gardens, urban gardens, container gardens, and more. Why? Because nothing compares to the taste of homegrown food or seeing the beauty of your very own flower garden!

At the Root of Gardening is Greater Health



Physical Benefits

Gardening is a low-impact exercise — one that provides your body with the weekly activity it needs without the cost of joining a gym or purchasing expensive equipment. The energy you expend digging, watering, pulling, patting, caring for, and harvesting your garden may even help you shed a few pounds — since gardening helps you burn anywhere from 200 to 400 calories per hour.

According to a study at Texas A & M University and hosted by the American Horticultural Society: Gardeners reported more physical activity, claimed more energy, and rated their overall health higher than non-gardeners.



Penn State Master Gardener, Gretchen Lea, talks about the health benefits of gardening.

Mental Benefits

Gardening isn't just good for the body. It's also a fun, leisurely pursuit that promotes good mental health in a variety of ways, including:

Relieves Stress: A study done by Kaiser Permanente showed the brainwave activity of a gardener mirrored that of someone praying or meditating. A related study done in the Netherlands compared gardening to reading and reported that gardening and reading each led to decreases in cortisol (the stress hormone).

Fosters Mindfulness: In a world teeming with a multitude of distractions, gardening not only connects us back to nature, but also to the present. Gardening makes you more aware of what's around you — the dirt, the sun, the weeds, that friendly earthworm — giving you a greater ability to actually “see” and enjoy your surroundings more thoroughly.

Builds Connections: Want to spend more time with your significant other? Bond with your kids? Start a fun project with your teenager? Or share your bounty of fresh produce with neighbors and friends? Gardening is the perfect endeavor for bringing people closer together and building social connections essential to living a healthy life.



Let's Get Gardening!



Getting Started

When starting a garden, it's best to take to heart the wise piece of advice from the Old Farmer's Almanac:

It's better to be proud of a small garden than to be frustrated by a big one!

Penn State Master Gardener Gretchen Lea offers these valuable tips for the inner gardener in all of us looking to get started:

- Whether you're starting an in-ground, raised-bed, or container garden, choose a spot that gets sun. Vegetables, in particular, love the sun!
- Your soil may benefit from a dose of compost. Compost is rich in the nutrients your soil needs for producing a healthy yield of vegetables or a bed of beautiful flowers.
- Check soil conditions to make sure it's not too soggy. Too much water is one of the biggest mistakes made and can quickly lead to an unsuccessful gardening experience.
- Start growing! Whether that means from seeds, plants, or both. For a vegetable garden, plant what you like to eat. For flowers, decide what colors you love and what you'd like to see in a vase in your home.



Gretchen Lea explains how beginners can easily get started.

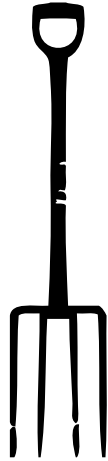
Basic Tools

You don't need a lot of equipment to start building your own garden, but there are a few basic tools you'll want to have on hand before you begin:

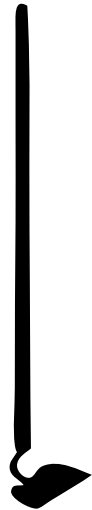
Shovel



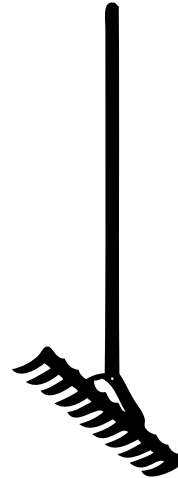
Spading fork



Hoe



Rake



Soaking hose



Hand weeder



Basket, bucket or wheelbarrow



Types of Gardening



Herb Gardening

Laura Washington, the community gardens manager in Pottstown for the [Mosaic Community Land Trust](#), advises those just getting started to begin with an herb garden.

Start by purchasing seedlings, and as you get into the swing of things, an herb garden can quickly serve as a gateway to starting a vegetable garden. In fact, add a few tomato and pepper plants, and you have almost all the ingredients for a pizza garden — a fun project especially for kids.

Herb gardening essentials include:

- Pots or containers
- Potting soil and fertilizer
- Plants
- Watering can
- Trowel

“Growing your own herbs won’t take up too much space and is a great way to give food a tasty accent.”

Laura Washington



Backyard Gardening

Backyard gardening doesn't have to be complicated. Remember, start small — and as you experience the joys of having a garden and become more knowledgeable and accomplished, you can expand your garden each year.

To get your backyard garden ready, follow these simple steps:

1. **Pick a nice, level flat area** — a four-by-four-foot plot of land is a good start for vegetables. For flowers, decide where you'd like to dig the beds.
2. **Clear the area** — pick up any debris, rocks, branches, brush, twigs, etc.
3. **Aerate the soil** — use a spade or shovel to break up the ground and turn over the soil. Clear any rocks or branches you may unearth.
4. **Add soil amendments or plant food** — soil amendments are materials that are mixed into the topsoil to promote healthy plant growth. Plant food, which is found in bags of potting soil, improves poor soil by enriching it with essential vitamins and minerals.



Laura Washington, community gardens manager for Mosaic Community Land Trust, talks about how to manage your own garden.

Container Gardening

Not everyone has the room for a backyard garden. For those without the free space, there's container gardening.

Pots, tubs, half barrels, and window boxes are all perfectly acceptable gardening environments.

First, decide where you want the containers to be located, because once they're filled with potting mix they'll be hard to move (*Note: plain garden soil is too dense for container planting*). After you have your mix in your container, flood it with water several times to make sure the soil is uniformly moist before planting. Finally, if you're planting a mixed container, ignore spacing requirements and plant densely. Be sure to prune plants once they fill in.



Gardening with Kids

Gardening is an American pastime that the entire family can enjoy together. Kids are no exception. Here are a few ideas on how to get your kids to join in the fun:

Start in the kitchen:

Prepare meals together. Ideally, the more involved your kids become with food, the more interested they'll become in the process of growing it.

Put them in charge:

Let your kids choose what they want to grow and give them a space of their own to plant in. They'll love checking "their spot" and watching their flowers or crops grow.



Assign age-appropriate tasks:

Naturally, you can include kids of all ages in every part of the garden, but just be aware of their abilities and interests. For instance, small children may get more enjoyment out of fun, simple tasks like watering and digging while older kids may take a more active interest in actually planning and designing the garden.

Be a role model:

Set a routine to visit and care for the garden and stick to it! Show your kids the proper way to dig, mulch, plant, and spread fertilizer. Show them how to use garden tools safely. Wear proper gardening clothes, including hats, gloves, and boots. Remember to hydrate, and be sure to wear a hat and sunscreen, especially on sunny days.

Above all else, gardening with your kids should be fun! So make it a special time together — one where you can learn, work, play, and spend time connecting with each other.

Share Your Garden & Be Inspired

If you love your garden, share it!

Enter your labor of love in area garden tours and contests like the [Mosaic Community Land Trust's annual Home Garden Contest](#).

For additional gardening inspiration, take a tour on Pinterest — one of the site's most popular categories is gardening! While you're there, be sure to follow the [Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation \(@PAHWF\)](#) and check out its gardening board for more tips and tricks!





About The Foundation

The Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation's mission is to enhance the health and wellness of area residents, providing education, funding and programs that motivate people to adopt healthy lifestyles. Visit www.pottstownfoundation.org for more information about the Foundation. Discover Pottstown area's online community at www.missionhealthyliving.org to learn and share information on how to lead a healthier life. You can also follow Mission Healthy Living on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) in addition to the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation on [Pinterest](#).

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