INSPIRE TO MOVE - Gardening is Exercise: Part 2, Your Yard and Beyond

By Lydia Schillinger

Have you ever experienced the sweet, juicy flavors and smells of fresh, garden-grown fruits and vegetables? There is nothing better, especially when grown in your backyard or community. Whether you are a novice or a seasoned horticulturist, there are a few basic rules of thumb for growing a successful harvest. The health benefits of gardening are impressive. Inspire to Move - Gardening is Exercise (April issue) gives you great examples of how moving in the garden uses those large muscle groups. Whether you are doing the dirty work or leaving that to someone else, you will still reap the many health benefits of gardening.

If you choose to take on a garden of your own, according to the Illinois Extension, make sure to choose the right garden for your space. Gardens may be placed in a sunny area of your yard in the ground, in a raised bed, or in large pots on your patio or deck. Make sure the garden area gets plenty of sun. Six to eight hours of sunlight per day in an area that is not too windy is recommended to keep your plants happy. Once your spot is selected, you will need to prepare it. Choose the right soil when starting your garden. Make certain the soil is nutrient-rich and drains
well. Adding organic matter in the form of compost and manure to the soil will help your plants grow.

No matter where you start your garden, remember to start small. To keep your garden maintainable, create a plan before you go to the garden center. Identify what fruits and vegetables you enjoy and then select 3-5 of your favorites. Mix in flowers, such as marigolds, which discourage pests, attract pollinators, and add some color! Visit the Illinois Extension Gardeners Corner Spring 2021 for more gardening tips!

Let someone else do the dirty work. You do not have to be the gardener to reap the health benefits. Taking a stroll through a Springfield, Chicago, Urbana, or Champaign's farmer’s market or volunteering at a community garden will get you moving. Community Gardens are shared open spaces where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden. Find a Springfield, Chicago, or Urbana-Champaign community garden in your area or help with one of our campus community gardens. Visit Springfield’s Community Garden, Chicago’s Heritage Garden, or UIUC’s Idea Garden to learn more and see how you can help.

**Top 10 Easy Vegetables** *(Tip: Click on a veggie’s name to see its detailed Growing Guide.)*

- Lettuce
- Green beans
- Radishes
- Tomatoes *(bush variety or cherry are easiest)*
- Zucchini
- Peppers
- Beets
- Carrots
- Chard, Spinach, or Kale
- Peas