

April: Gear up for Gardening!

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Gardeners know, and research confirms, that nurturing plants is good for us: attitudes toward health and nutrition improve, kids perform better at school, and community spirit grows. Every April communities, organizations, and individuals nationwide celebrate National Garden Month. Gardening can be a great way to enjoy the outdoors, get physical activity, beautify the community, and grow nutritious fruits and vegetables.



Benefits of Gardening and Safety Tips:



Fruits and vegetables—more matters. Gardens can motivate children to try new fruits and vegetables, and kids are eager to taste the 'fruits'

of their labor. Fruits and vegetables are an important source of vitamins and minerals, provide fiber, color and texture, and may reduce disease risk, but few children or adults eat recommended amounts. Gardening with your kids will get them excited about the plants on their plate.



Be more physically active. Did you know you can burn up to 150 calories by gardening for approximately 30-45 minutes? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest gardening as a way to get some of the 2 ½ hours of recommended weekly activity. If you have been inactive, start out

gradually each day, building up time and intensity. Vary your gardening activities to keep it interesting and broaden the benefits.



Grow a successful garden.

According to the National Gardening Association, the best way to launch a successful garden is to start small and choose varieties that do well in your area. You might start with vegetables your children already enjoy, or try selecting plants

around a theme such as a rainbow garden to increase their interest.



Gear up for gardening with safety.

It is important to remember safety when working outdoors. Wear safety goggles, sturdy shoes, and long pants when using lawn mowers or other machinery. Wear gloves to lower the risk for skin irritations, cuts, and certain contaminants and protect your

hearing when using loud machinery. Lower your risk for sunburn by wearing long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats, sun shades, and sunscreen.



Stay hydrated. As the gardening season progresses, it's important to be smart about staying hydrated when temperatures are on the rise. Drink plenty of water throughout the day to replace lost fluids. Sipping throughout the day is better than saving up for meals or breaks.



Take breaks. Take breaks often and rest in shaded areas so your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover. Stop working if you experience breathlessness or muscle soreness. Signs of heat-related illness include extremely high body temperature, headache, rapid pulse, dizziness, nausea,

confusion, or unconsciousness.

Know how. Know now.



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Gardening can have a positive impact on your eating habits, physical activity level, and overall well-being. Whether you are a beginner or expert gardener, health and safety are always important. UNL Extension has lots of resources on gardening from the

Nebraska Master Gardener Program, urban agriculture, Backyard Farmer, growing herbs, and local foods by the season. For more information, resources, and recipes related to gardening check out:

http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/april#Garden_Month

Additional Resources & Links:

- **UNL Extension: Nebraska Master Gardener Program.** The Nebraska Master Gardener program extends the outreach of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) by providing volunteers with research-based horticulture education, which prepares them to share their knowledge with the citizens of the State.
<http://mastergardener.unl.edu/>
- **Horticulture Nebline on Starting Transplants Inside.** Starting flower and vegetable transplants at home can be fun. Growing quality transplants requires good seed, a sterile, well-drained growing medium, proper temperature, proper moisture requirements and adequate light.
<http://lancaster.unl.edu/nebline/2012/mar12/page06.pdf>
- **Urban agriculture** is the practice of producing food within or surrounding an urban area: Farms (large and small), community gardens, and backyard gardens. Get started gardening, preparing and preserving food.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/localfoods/urbanag>
- **Backyard Farmer.** The televised version of Backyard Farmer has been on the air, each April to September, since 1953. The panel provides research-based answers to gardening questions about insect pests, fruits and vegetables, turf to landscape design and much more.
<http://byf.unl.edu/fruitvegetable>

- **Growing Herbs.** Like most vegetable crops and many annual flowers, most herbs grow best in a sunny location with well drained soil. Unlike these other plants, however, herbs often thrive in less fertile, dry soil. In fact, if they get too much nitrogen from fertilizer or manure, they tend to lose their characteristic flavors and aromas. For more information go to:
http://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2005/Grow_Herbs.shtml
- **Local Foods by the Season.** While many local foods can be purchased year round, to get the richest flavors and freshest foods follow the four seasons. Check out these helpful recipes and tips.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/localfoods/seasonal-foods>

Sources:

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<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Department of Health and Human Services. Gardening Health and Safety Tips. 2011.
<http://www.cdc.gov/family/gardening/index.htm>
3. National Gardening Association. When You Garden, You Grow. 2012.
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This Newsletter has been peer reviewed.