

Gardening as an Ostomate

written by Jackie Dudley

With all the weather we have been having lately, my garden has needed a great deal of attention lately.

While it is tempting to get out and work hard in the garden, we need to take a little time to consider our body especially if we have not been used to doing regular exercise for a while. To prevent any strain to our back and more especially the area around our stoma we need to remember to take care. The advice given to me stated quite clearly, 'not more than one hour at a time'. I have to admit that at first I tended to ignore this advice but soon changed my mind! I found that having a break for a 'cuppa' certainly helped, it allowed me to take time completing garden tasks that have since given me a great deal of pleasure – and no pain!

So, what can we do to help prevent strains to our body and at the same time protect the vulnerable area surrounding our stoma and the stoma itself? The answer to the first point is to do some gentle warm up exercises that will help blood flow to the muscles, your GP or stoma care nurse will be pleased to advise you. Secondly, invest in a good support garment. These are specialist garments available on prescription and will give extra support to your tummy muscles as well as additional protection to your stoma. (Your stoma care nurse will be able to measure you and help you find what suits you best also CA has an information sheet available listing current suppliers of support garments).

Wearing a support garment may take a while to get used to and produce 'pancaking' but that is a small price to pay for the satisfaction of good support for the weaker areas of the body. If you do have a hernia it must be protected and supported. If you are lucky enough not to have a hernia then it is even more important to safeguard against that possibility by taking those extra minutes to put on your support garment or belt. This should help prevent a hernia forming.

Here are a few of my top tips...

• **Bending** – When bending over always bend at your knees not your waist. Instead of flowerbeds at ground level why not try introducing raised flowerbeds into your garden, this will ease the amount of bending. You may need help with making a raised bed, if possible try to incorporate built in

seating as this will make maintenance easier make sure to include seating for that ever important, cup of tea! Raising ornamental pots on bricks or stands means you will not have to bend to plant, weed or water! Try growing a mix of evergreens and perennials in ornamental pots these will look good throughout the winter and you will have flowers every year, you can now buy wheelie pot stands for ease of movement.

• **Stretching** – To prevent stretching why not simplify your garden. Increase or decrease the depth of your borders so you weed or plant out without too much effort. If you already have deep borders plant shrubs at the back of the border that are variegated or evergreen source varieties that require little maintenance. Only plant the border edges with bedding plants. Introduce shingle or bark to cut down on weeding. Consider doing away with flower beds altogether and replace them with lawn, shingle or paving. Position container grown plants at regular intervals to attract the eye and grow plants that are both bird and insects friendly.

• **Pushing** – If you are using a hand push mower take great care, as you will be using your tummy muscles, it may be a good idea to replace it with a rotary mower, or better still ask someone else to cut the grass for you. If you use a wheelbarrow remember you are lifting as well as pushing. Try not to fill the barrow too full although it may take longer to transfer the contents it is better than the risk of a pulled muscle or strain.

• **Lifting** – This is something we often do automatically without thinking only to wake up the next day with an aching neck or shoulder. Remind yourself before picking up a pot or lifting a watering can to think about your bodies position to avoid straining yourself. If you are watering your garden with a watering can fill it mid-way or better still use a hosepipe unless of course there is a ban in your area. Better still ask someone else to do it for you!

• **Helpful Tools** – Walk around any garden centre these days and you will find items that will ease the pain of gardening. High kneeling pads that are also a seat, a new type of wheelbarrow that can be pulled – not pushed, a garden tidy (rather like a

shopping trolley with pockets) long handled small garden forks and trowels, garden refuse sacks, multi-pick garden tools for picking up small branches etc.,

• **Garden Plant Supports** – There are also a plethora of plant supports - hoops, arches, stakes and pyramids as well as good old trellis. We are all being encouraged to grow our own vegetables. Why not grow your tomatoes, peas and beans up against a trellis making them easier to pick. Start off your seeds or buy raised seedlings and plant them out in grow bags placed on an old table or stand – ask for help with any lifting.

• **Start an Exchange Club** – for the over abundance of crops and with the economic climate affecting us all – why not try the barter system. If you are unable to cut your hedge or mow the lawn why not offer your services to your neighbour – baking cakes, repairing items, ironing, in exchange for their gardening skills?

Gardening is physical work but with a little forward thinking it can be easily managed and is highly rewarding and good for the soul. The best part of gardening is sitting in a comfortable chair on a warm summers day and admiring the fruits of your labour (or that of your neighbours!).

The weather forecast is good for this summer – and I am sure we shall all be out in the garden enjoying the sunshine. I would love to see photos of your gardens in full bloom do write in and tell me your best gardening tips – if you share them I am sure we will all benefit!

Editors Comment

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