

West Georgia Living  
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## Get Up and Get Gardening

You have heard some of these said, haven't you? Get out of that chair! Don't be a couch potato! Get outside! Exercise! Don't worry! Eat right! Enjoy the beauty of every day! They all relate to a state of well-being or being healthy.

Being healthy is a worthy goal, but what does it mean exactly? Being healthy not only means the absence of disease and a healthy body, but a healthy mental attitude, a healthy lifestyle and healthy ways of relating to the environment. One way to have a healthy lifestyle is to garden, so get up and get gardening!

The benefits of gardening are obvious - eating more fresh, healthy vegetables and fruits, of course. Other benefits are physical activity, mental well-being, and using knowledge and skills to be a productive individual. Perhaps even lower grocery bills will result from growing your own foods.

Vegetables and fruits that ripen in your garden have more nutrients than those you buy in the store. You decide which fertilizers and pesticides to use or not use in your garden, therefore, which ones come in contact with you and your family. Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins, minerals and fiber that can reduce the risk of stroke, diabetes, heart disease, obesity and some types of cancer, so the more types of healthy foods you eat, the healthier you will be. Trying healthier cooking methods can add to the nutrients your body uses. Roasting vegetables instead of frying them is healthy, quick and easy. The southern staple, fried okra, is really tasty cooked without the frying. Grill it outside in a grill pan or roast it inside your oven and have a more nutritious food.

Fresh foods are the best foods. Most foods purchased at regular grocery stores are picked in another location, then shipped to the grocery store. Those foods must be picked before fully ripe, reducing their vitamin and mineral content. Do we even know how long it took that food to travel from farm to table or how long it has been on the grocery store shelf? Walking to the garden and picking produce at the peak of ripeness is a unique experience. Fresh picked foods taste better so you are more likely to eat more types of the foods that your body needs, not processed foods, but fresh and nutritious ones.

Buying locally is a healthy choice in many local farming communities. Carroll County is fortunate to have local farmers who grow and sell their foods to the public. Carrollton also has the local Cotton Mill Farmers' Market and the Farmer's Fresh CSA store where local farmers sell their foods - meats, dairy, jellies, grains, fruits and vegetables. Consider purchasing from these locations if you can't garden yourself.

The most popular food to grow, pick and eat from the garden is tomatoes. No store bought tomato compares to the taste of a home grown one! This fruit that acts like a vegetable is one of the healthiest foods you can eat. Tomatoes are an excellent source vitamin C, biotin, molybdenum, and vitamin K. They are also a very good source of copper, potassium, manganese, dietary fiber, vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene), vitamin B6, folate, niacin, vitamin E, and phosphorus. Yes, our bodies need all of these vitamins and minerals! Perhaps that is why our taste buds know the vine-ripened tomato tastes better.

Gardening can motivate family members to participate in the physical activity and in the consumption of foods that they take part in growing. Our grandchildren come to visit us but one of the first things they do when they get here is to run to the garden to find what is growing and what needs picking. The garden is a stimulating place for children. Scientific studies have shown that children who participate in gardening eat more vegetables than those who do not have that opportunity. When children help plant the seeds, water the plants, watch them grow, then pick the fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to enjoy and eat them.

Gardening can result in less waste. In the grocery store you don't find misshapen fruits and vegetables. You find only perfectly shaped ones. What happens to the ones that don't make the grade? Are they tossed? Probably. In a garden you will toss less and salvage more, which helps our environment. Home grown ugly food has the same vitamins and minerals of the perfectly shaped foods. If you grow it, you are more likely to eat it, even when it isn't perfect. In our garden the grandchildren think carrots with two legs are cute, and they think it is a treat to eat them. We cut off the places the birds peck on the strawberries, cut up the remaining parts and eat on cereal. An overgrown zucchini becomes zucchini bread. If the squirrel nibbles on the tomato, we wash it well, cut off the teeth marks and make a tomato sandwich with it.

If you are interested in gardening, start small and grow things you like really enjoy eating. Pick a sunny spot with access to water. Consider raised bed gardening which allows you to use contaminant-free soil. You don't have room for to garden in your yard? Then choose a community garden in Carrollton. Tanner Health System and Keep Carroll Beautiful teamed to place community gardens around town. Perhaps one is near you. Contact Tanner Health System 678-321-4816 to learn more.

You could begin a gardening experience with some large containers, add rich soil and plant just a few vegetables that you would enjoy eating. Have you ever heard of a pizza garden? Tomatoes, green peppers and basil can be used to create a well-liked dish from freshly grown foods. Just three pots will get you started.

Physical activity is necessary in gardening. So gardening can promote, strength, agility, range of motion, eye-hand coordination, and improved motor skills, all of which are crucial for a healthy heart and body. Tilling, weeding, hammering stakes, building trellises, pushing a wheelbarrow, squatting, crawling, bending, dragging hoses, moving

dirt and building raised beds are just some of the physical tasks that are needed when gardening. I read that one hour of weeding burns about 300 calories. If you need a place to weed, come to my house. I have plenty!

Is gardening costly? It can be or it can be economical. A packet of tomato seeds costs around \$3. If 50% of the seeds germinate, say 25 of 50, and become fruit-bearing plants, and each plant bears a minimum of 10 pounds of tomatoes, that is 250 pounds of tomatoes for \$3. A real bargain! If you buy 25 tomato plants at \$3 each and each plant bears a minimum of 10 pounds, that is 250 pounds for \$75, which is still better than buying tomatoes at the grocery store for \$.99 per pound or more. The question is what do you do with 250 pounds of tomatoes? Eat what you can, share some with others, and preserve the rest to use throughout the year. Vegetable soup or spaghetti in the winter is delicious with preserved home-grown tomatoes. Other costs to consider in your home garden are fertilizer, pesticides, raised bed materials, tools, soil, and water.

So is it worth it to garden? For all the benefits of gardening, I'd recommend it as a stress releaser and for your mental well being, for a more healthy diet, as a great exercise program, as a way to waste less, and as an inexpensive way to get large amounts of health foods.