



## AGING TODAY

# Spring has Sprung



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

**As the glorious weather precedes the spring equinox,** chants of, "This is why we live here" can be heard throughout the Valley of the Sun. For Phoenixians, amnesia is bliss, as we repress all memory of those triple digit days. Knowing how precious time and the mild temperatures are let's celebrate spring in the garden. Grab your aging loved one, and seize the season.

The National Diabetes Education Program lists gardening, as one of five ways older adults can be more physically active. Studies support that with an average gardening time of 60 minutes, an average heart rate of 98, it is possible for older adults to meet physical activity recommendations through gardening. Gardening not only promotes mobility, but can also promote flexibility and encourages the use of all motor skills. Gardening can increase endurance and strength and helps prevent diseases like osteoporosis.

The physical health benefits of rolling up your sleeves and digging in mother earth is really the edible flower on the cake, because it is the psychological benefits that cannot be overstated. Ask any experienced gardener if the miracle of a plant blooming or a vegetable ripening ever gets old. There is a profound sense of accomplishment when the cycle of life is so visible and rapidly completed during growing seasons or years in the garden. Additionally, the feeling of well-being is a direct result of having a sense of control which is often predictive of good health and a higher quality of life among the elderly. Time spent in green spaces also reduces stress levels and promotes relaxation.

Gardening makes good sense for maintaining a healthy aging brain. The stimulation of spending time outdoors and with new or varied interests is a great way to keep the neurons firing. The social comp

onent to gardening is probably one of the most important psychological benefits for our aging population. Seniors who are involved with community projects and who feel a sense of purpose report better overall health and well-being.

So, how does one get started on this amazing journey? Start by Horticulture Professor Google; I started with Arizona and garden club in the search window. Local nurseries such as Summerwinds and Berridge offer a variety of seminars and classes for free or nominal charges. At the Scottsdale Xeriscape Garden at Chaparral Park and The Desert Botanical Garden, the classes, events, and learning opportunities are abundant with an expansive variety of topics.

I can't stress enough the importance of safety and caution when embarking on activities outdoors, especially for seniors. Some physical, mental and age-related conditions must be considered when older people work in the garden, but they should not prevent people from enjoying the garden:

- Skin – fragile, thinning skin makes older people susceptible to bumps, bruises and sunburn
- Vision – poor eyesight could restrict activities
- Body temperature – dehydration and heat stroke prevention
- Skeletal – good shoes, use caution to prevent falls

Garden spaces, tools and equipment can be modified or adapted to help reduce the physical stress associated with gardening for older people:

- Using vertical planting to make garden beds accessible for planting and harvesting – try using wall and trellis spaces
- Raising beds to enable people with physical restrictions to avoid bending and stooping

- Using retractable hanging baskets, wheelbarrows and containers on castors to make suitable movable and elevated garden beds
- Using foam, tape and plastic tubing to modify existing tools for a better grip
- Providing shade areas for working in summer months
- Having stable chairs and tables to use for comfortable gardening

If you feel that gardening may be too much, nature walks or landscape photography will still awaken your senses with appreciation for the beauty of our desert. Remember, everything, and I mean everything ever written about promoting a healthy aging brain states the same path: Exercise, socialize, and engage in novel, challenging activities. Gardening provides all of these.

So, even if you proclaim your thumb to be the color of dirt, there is no reason you can't dig in anyway. Here's why...guess what we have here in our glorious desert? TWO GROWING SEASONS!!! That's right, you get a mulligan. Limited success this spring, try it again in October.

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