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## Good gardening tools and habits will keep you working strong

Well-made garden tools that fit your body and suit your task make all the difference.

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WHEN IT comes to staying safe in the garden, it's all about preventing injuries in the first place. You don't want to waste time recovering from a sore back because you couldn't resist moving that heavy pot by yourself, or a twisted ankle from stretching beyond your center of gravity to prune just one more limb. Especially this time of year, when we're scrambling to keep up, and all we want to do is accomplish one task and then the next.

Which is a big part of the problem, isn't it? We're so eager to get the beans into the ground and the seedlings watered that we don't notice how tired we are. Gardening is not a competitive sport. There's no prize at the end for those who finish first. There's never any "finishing" with gardening anyway, so you may as well slow down and savor the experience.

Garden tools are like pots and pans, kitchen knives and utensils. Well-made ones that fit your body and suit your task make all the difference in both results and the pleasure of doing the work. If your shovel is the right size and sharp enough, you probably won't use it as a crowbar to pry a plant out of the ground, hence wrenching your back and doing a number on your wrists.

Paying close attention to the moment helps keep you safe. What's the point of all this work if you don't tune into the smell of the soil, bird song, the bite of the wind, the warmth of the sun on the back of your neck? Slowing down enough to notice all that's going on around you feeds your senses, and your tasks become a meditation on the translucence of a poppy petal, the splendor of a ladybug, the wonder of a worm working the soil.

Take a brisk walk to warm up before you start gardening. Then when you set to work, remember to keep your knees slightly bent, drop your weight down into the earth, don't reach beyond the point where you're balanced on your own two feet. Sounds simple, but when gardening mania hits we forget we're embodied beings. As in the rest of life, mindfulness protects us from our excesses.

One problem is that most tools are made for men, and they're too bulky for the other half of us. The right size, weight and shape of a tool help prevent fatigue, injury and giving up. Check out Green Heron Tools ([www.greenherontools.com/](http://www.greenherontools.com/)), a company that offers these women-tested essentials:

**HerShovel** is a shovel/spade hybrid that comes in various handle lengths, with a comfy D-grip handle and sharp, tempered-steel blade.

**BAHCO DIY Ergonomic Pruner** is made in France, has a cushioned handle, comes in two sizes, and is designed to prevent tendons and nerves from being strained.

BAHCO also makes long-handled loppers that'll help you reach what you need to cut without leaning so far you compromise your balance.

**GT "Kuro" Hori-Hori Stainless Steel Soil Knife** with Comfort Grip is perfect for sawing through roots or dividing clumps of perennials. One side is serrated, the other smooth, and the blade has depth markers for planting.

As vital as any tool is a sun hat with a wide brim, a handy tube of sunscreen, well-fitting boots and gloves, and a box of Epsom salt to pour into a hot, restorative bath.

Remember that the best tools don't make up for a common-sense strategy. Change tasks frequently to prevent repetitive strain, take regular breaks with your favorite beverage, and pay attention to what your body is telling you.

And finally: Slow down enough to relish the work as you go.

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