



## The Health Benefits of Gardening



By Ingrid Angelini, UC Master Gardener, Mariposa

Is your New Years' Resolution to do something to improve your health? You may want to consider the health benefits of gardening.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that gardening raises self-esteem, improves cardiovascular health, reduces stress and anxiety, promotes better sleep, increases hand strength, fosters relationships and sets the stage for future health.

The self-esteem stems (no pun intended) from actually planting, tending and harvesting the plants, thereby offering a feeling of accomplishment. It was found that gardening can reduce the level of Cortisol, the stress hormone. By being outdoors we inhale *Mycobacterium vaccae*, a healthy bacterium which resides in soil and can increase serotonin levels, thereby reducing anxiety.

Cardiovascular benefits are derived from moving around as the garden is maintained. Calories are thus burned and an active lifestyle reduces the incidence of obesity, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and stroke.

Intense physical activity is well known to foster deep sleep but even light physical activity while gardening, can lead to a better night's rest. Strength in the hands and fingers is promoted by the digging, planting and pulling involved in gardening.

While gardening alone can increase the aforementioned qualities of life and health, gardening with friends and family fosters bonds, and spreads well-being among participants. When children play in the dirt at an early age, there is a link to a reduction in future health problems, including allergies and autoimmune disorders.

Michigan State University, in cooperation with its university extension program, adds the benefits of reduced risk of colon cancer and premature death, and notes that exercising both the arms and legs helps to prevent afflictions such as coronary disease.

The National Institutes of Health found one study revealing that daily gardening can reduce the risk of dementia by 36%. Evidence exists that growing plants actually enhances the brain.

Cornell University researchers found that even growing an indoor plant can boost attention and improve one's mood.

Growing food leads to better eating and nutrition. Consuming your home-grown fruits and vegetables supports all those things mentioned earlier, by providing the antioxidants, vitamins and other nutrients need for a healthy body and brain.

Exposure to sunshine, the major source of vitamin D, by being outdoors strengthens the bones and immune system. Of course, avoid the peak hours between 10 am and 2 pm, particularly in summer, and be sure to use sunscreen and sunglasses.

Gardening sharpens the mind, strengthens the body and soothes the soul.

*UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County are located at 5009 Fairgrounds Rd., Mariposa. For more gardening and event information, visit our website ([http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master\\_Gardener/](http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/)) and Facebook page (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County). UC Master Gardeners staff a Helpline serving Mariposa County, including Greeley Hill, Coulterville, and Lake Don Pedro (209-966-7078 or [mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu)). Listen to us on the radio at KRYZ 98.5 FM on Wednesdays at 2 pm and Saturdays at 5 pm.*