myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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Wellness Wednesdays

APRIL, 2025 WEEK 2

GARDENING FOR WELLNESS:

Maintaining Your Health, One Garden at a Time

April is National Cancer Control Month and Earth Day, so this is the ideal time to focus on how sustainable habits like gardening support both personal health and the environment. Gardening is a peaceful pastime that can also be a proactive step toward wellness.

Research suggests that exposure to certain pesticides and chemicals in conventionally grown produce may contribute to increased cancer risk. By growing your own organic fruits and vegetables, you can limit exposure to these harmful substances while enjoying the nutritional benefits of fresh, homegrown food.

WHY CHOOSE ORGANIC GARDENING?

Organic gardening eliminates synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers, which have been linked to health concerns. Studies show that pesticide exposure may contribute to an increased risk of certain cancers, including lymphoma and breast cancer. By choosing to grow produce naturally, you can:

1. **Reduce Chemical Exposure –** Limiting contact with synthetic pesticides and herbicides may lower the risk of toxin buildup in the body.
2. **Support Nutrient-Dense Foods –** Organically grown produce often contains higher levels of antioxidants, which help fight inflammation and support cellular health.
3. **Encourage a Healthier Lifestyle –** Gardening itself is a form of physical activity that promotes well-being, reduces stress, and encourages healthy eating.

Even if you don't have space for a garden, sourcing organic produce from local farmers' markets or participating in a community garden can help you reap the same benefits.

FOLLOW THE MOUSE:
We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

Continued on next page

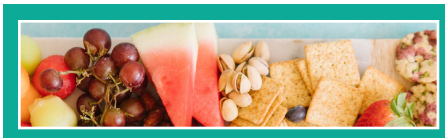
Continued from page 1

THE WELLNESS BENEFITS OF GARDENING

Tending to a garden can be a healing practice for our minds, bodies, AND the earth. Spending time outdoors, working with plants, and eating homegrown food can:

Reduce Stress:

Gardening has been shown to lower cortisol levels, the hormone linked to stress. Since tending to plants requires maintaining a routine, the repetitive nature of gardening can even be meditative. Between watering, weeding, pruning, and harvesting, there's plenty of opportunity to take our attention away from the stress of our lives and redirect it to something soothing. Some researchers suggest that even 30 minutes in the garden a day can significantly improve our stress levels over time.



Encourage Healthy Eating:

Eating foods high in fiber is one way to reduce the risk of several types of cancer, and having them within your reach makes it easier to eat a diet rich in cancer-fighting nutrients. One study from Harvard suggests that people who garden eat 7% more fiber than those who don't.

Increase Physical Activity:

While gardening is a soothing activity, that doesn't mean it's easy! Digging, planting, and weeding provide low-impact exercise to keep you moving daily. In fact, 45 minutes of gardening can burn the same amount of calories as 30 minutes of aerobics!
Plus, you'll get to enjoy the fruits of your labor–literally–at the end of every gardening session.

EASY STEPS TO START YOUR CANCER-FIGHTING GARDEN

You don't need a large backyard to start an organic garden. Whether you have a full plot, a small raised bed, a community garden spot, or just a few pots on a balcony, here's how to get started:

1. **Choose organic seeds and soil –** Look for non-GMO, organic-certified seeds and soil free from synthetic chemicals.
2. **Avoid pesticides and herbicides –** Use natural pest control methods like companion planting, introducing beneficial insects, or making homemade sprays with garlic or neem oil.
3. **Grow cancer-fighting foods –** Certain fruits and vegetables are particularly rich in antioxidants and phytochemicals that help protect against cancer. Great options include:
   - Tomatoes (rich in lycopene, linked to lower cancer risk)
   - Cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli, kale, and Brussels sprouts, known for cancer-fighting properties)
   - Berries (high in antioxidants that help repair cell damage)
   - Garlic and Onions (contain compounds that may help reduce cancer risk)

Green Tip! Some cancer-fighting foods are easy to grow indoors. Tomatoes and kale can grow abundantly in a flowerpot with lots of natural light, even in a windowsill

4. **Compost for Natural Fertilizer –** Skip chemical fertilizers and enrich your soil with compost made from kitchen scraps and yard waste.

Green Tip! Start a small compost bin with fruit and veggie scraps, coffee grounds, and yard clippings. Keep it aerated and moist, and in a few months, you'll have rich, natural fertilizer for your garden!

5. **Stay Sun-Smart –** Gardening means spending time outdoors, so wear sunscreen, a hat, and protective clothing to reduce UV exposure.

Continued on next page

Continued from page 2

GROW A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Gardening is much more than a hobby. It can be a way to nurture your body and protect the planet at the same time. By choosing organic, pesticide-free produce, you can lower exposure to harmful chemicals, eat nutrient-rich foods, and enjoy the wellness benefits of time spent outdoors.

This Earth Day, consider starting a garden, visiting a farmers' market, or making small changes that support both personal health and environmental sustainability. Every step toward cleaner living is a step toward greater health and improving overall well-being.

Let this season of growth be one of renewed health and mindful choices.

Found this week's edition of Wellness Wednesdays to be helpful? Spread the word to your colleagues so they too can take advantage of the health benefits of gardening in 2025.

SOURCES: *Monica Egerer, et. al.*, *Forbes*, *Garden.org*, *Jun Hu et. al.*, *Harvard Medical School*, *Aleksandra Kapała et. al.*, *Jane V Higdon et. al.*, *Shahida Shafi et. al.*, *Holly L Nicastro et. al.*, *Sustainable Agriculture Network*