

Road to **WELLfluent**TM

Embrace better health.

How a Family Garden Will Improve Your Health

Dig in the Dirt Together to Add Physical Activity and Subtract Stress

Whether you have an acre of land or a few pots on a balcony, plant a family garden: You'll all live healthier! Gardening is an easy activity to share and you'll harvest benefits along with your fresh vegetables, colorful flowers, and aromatic herbs. Even better, you don't have to wait for your plants to bloom to see those benefits. Some of them (like stress relief) are almost instantaneous.

When parents and kids work together to plant and care for a garden, they can all enjoy these perks.

Physical Activity

Gardening and yard work are moderate-intensity exercises, which we all need every day (for at least 30 minutes). While tending your family garden doesn't require the vigorous activity of, say, running or playing singles tennis, it's still beneficial to your body. Research shows that once you start gardening, you usually continue for more than the recommended 30 minutes. And gardening incorporates fine-motor skill strengthening and stretching.

Lower Stress, Better Mood

Gardening is an excellent stress reliever for a combination of fascinating reasons: exposure to fresh air and sunlight, relaxing and repetitive tasks, and even contact with harmless bacteria in the soil that helps release serotonin in the brain.

Outdoor Time

Children are prone to spending a lot of time indoors, which can negatively affect their behavior and health. A family garden gets them outside enjoying and experiencing the natural world.

Better Sleep

All of the above (physical activity, reduced stress, being outside) can contribute to more and better sleep for everyone. And better sleep, in turn, can improve kids' behavior and performance at school.



Healthier Eating

Kids who grow vegetables eat vegetables—or at least, they are more willing to taste unfamiliar veggies, which is the first step to incorporating those new flavors into their diet. Adults who garden are also more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables than non-gardeners.

Family Time

Planning, sowing, and tending a family garden offers physical activity with a purpose shared by everyone. Gardening helps teach kids responsibility and gives them a sense of accomplishment. It gives all of you a project to work on—and enjoy—together, which reinforces your family bond.

Projects for Your Family Garden

Consult with an expert neighbor, a family member, a local nursery, or a cooperative extension service to find out what plants will grow best where you live. You might consider investing in a rain barrel and starting a compost pile to make your garden more Earth-friendly, too.

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Vegetables

Start them from seed, or purchase seedlings to get a jump-start. If your kids have a favorite vegetable it's definitely worth letting them try to grow their own. You can find favorites like carrots, string beans, bell peppers, and potatoes in kid-appealing purple hues. Tomatoes, too, come in dozens of colors, shapes, and sizes.

Flowers

There are lots of options for involving kids in flower gardening. Let them pick out some seeds based on the pretty pictures on the packets. Or opt for drama with easy-to-grow sunflowers, which can reach as high as eight feet tall. Simple daisies produce lots of blooms for kids to enjoy, display, and craft with. Other blooms that are easy to grow (and thus less likely to lead to disappointment) are marigolds, snapdragons, and geraniums.

You might also decide to plant with a goal in mind, such as creating a butterfly garden full of plants that attract and nourish butterflies. You'll get the satisfaction of growing beautiful things while welcoming beautiful creatures.

Fruits

Fruit trees can be difficult to care for and may take several years to yield a harvest. But strawberries are a snap to grow from seeds or seedlings, and blackberries or raspberries can also be an option (plus they're perennial and will come back year after year). If you live in a very warm climate or keep them indoors, you can grow your own citrus fruits too.

Family Garden Chores for Kids

Kids can do a lot of the work for your family garden, either independently or alongside an adult. While you don't want them to burn out on tedious tasks like weeding, taking responsibility is part of what makes a family garden meaningful. Set a goal, such as clearing one small, designated area or working for 15 minutes, then do something else.

Depending on their ages, kids can:

- Collect sticks and other debris
- Spread bark or mulch
- Sprinkle plant food
- Bring compostables to the compost pile
- Water plants with a watering can or hose
- Rake leaves
- Weed (with instructions on what to pluck and what to keep)
- Dig holes for seeds or plants
- Harvest fruits or vegetables from the garden
- Snip flowers for a bouquet (again, instructions will be important!)
- Mow the lawn (age 10 and up)

Whatever you choose to do, make sure to educate your child along the way, too. You'll be growing his brain right along with your family crops.

Source: Benefits of Having a Family Garden (verywellfamily.com)

Mindful Awareness Moment

Having a Good Laugh Right Now

Take five minutes and search online for something humorous. It might be an excerpt from a television show, a medical humor website, a risqu limerick, or a knock-knock joke you can share with your kids. Just find something that gives you a good belly laugh.

As you laugh, note what happens in your body.

- Did laughing change your emotional state?
- How about your physical state?
- And what about your mental state?

April is Humor Month and conceived as a means to heighten public awareness of the therapeutic value of humor. It is known to improve well-being, boost morale, increase communication skills and enrich quality of life. The curative power of laughter and its ability to relieve debilitating stress and burnout may indeed be one of the great medical discoveries of our times.

Source: <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/healing-benefits-humor-laughter.asp>



10 ways to deal with stress

Helpful tools to help you manage daily stress.



Everyone gets stressed. You can't escape it. But how you deal with it is mainly up to you. Here are some tools to help you reduce stress in your life.

1. Know your signs.

How do you show stress? Some people get angry. Others find it hard to focus or make decisions. Some people feel worried or sad. Sometimes, stress can lead to headache, upset stomach or trouble sleeping. Different people show different signs. Your signs of stress may be different from someone else's.

2. Look at the causes.

What situations make you stressed? Your stress may be linked to your family, health or work. Keep in mind that stress is often caused by a change in your life — whether the change is good or bad. Marriage, divorce, losing a job or a getting a promotion can all result in stress.

3. Build good coping skills.

Think about how you deal with situations that cause you

stress. Smoking, drinking alcohol or eating too much may feel good at the time. But they can cause more harm in the long run.

4. Know when to say "no."

Sometimes the best way to deal with stress is to avoid it. Know your limits. And don't take on more than you can handle.

5. Plan ahead.

Don't let your to-do list get out of control. Think about your day and decide which tasks are most important. Do those first. Let other tasks drop to the end of — or even off — your list.

6. Create time to relax.

It's not always easy, but it's important to make time for you. Take vacations or other breaks. Make time to read a good book. Listen to music. Or do something you enjoy. Some people find that practicing deep breathing can also help reduce stress.

7. Be active.

Exercise can help lower stress. It can be as simple as taking quick walk, a bike ride or a trip to the gym. Aim to get about two and a half hours of exercise a week. But ease into it. And talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

8. Watch what you eat.

Eating good foods can also be good for stress. Healthy foods will help keep you energized and focused. Also, cut back on caffeine. You'll feel more relaxed and will likely sleep better, too.

9. Talk to family and friends.

Sometimes, just talking with supportive people helps lower stress. That's true even if the stressful situation doesn't change. Also, spend less time with people who only add to your stress.

10. Get help if you need.

If your stress is too much to handle, talk to a mental health professional. He or she can teach you helpful ways to deal with stress.

Source: <https://www.optumcare.com/resources/health-wellness-resources/library/deal-stress.html>

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