

Five Reasons to Start Gardening

Written by Maya Shetreat, M.D.

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Stress is a problem for just about everyone at some point or another. Having tools to ease it, whatever the source, can only help! Studies have shown that gardening effectively lowers your cortisol levels and decreases stress. That's right — simply connecting with soil, plants, and the beauty of nature relaxes you! Your body will even release endorphins — it does after sex or vigorous exercise.

Sometimes we get stressed from just thinking too much. Our minds have a finite capacity for the focused attention we use when answering emails or checking our phones. Exceeding it causes attention fatigue, which in turn can trigger irritability, distractibility, and stress.

The sounds and smells of gardening also help unlock the meditative state of involuntary attention. This effortless level of attention engages a wider focus. The soothing, repetitive movements of gardening help your body take over and your mind let go of unnecessary stress.

I call my time in the garden "natural Prozac." I feel so grounded, held, and connected to all of the gifts offered by Mother Earth. I experience it — nourishment and healing. It's a form of active meditation. There's something about seeing a gorgeous flower bloom, or watching tomatoes or okra ripen, that makes your body let out a huge, magnificent sigh.

4. Gardening gives you access to the freshest foods.

Food you grow yourself is some of the most nourishing food you can eat. Compared to grocery store food, which has been picked, shipped, and stored for weeks, the freshness of home-grown food is a game-changer. It's not just about taste — it's about nutrition. Home-grown produce is packed with vitamins and antioxidants that can help reduce inflammation and improve overall health. Plus, it's a great way to save money and reduce your carbon footprint.

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I've had children wander through my garden and pick cherry tomatoes or string beans and pop them into their mouths, with a face of such wonder and enjoyment. My own children talk about our plants as if they're their own babies, expressing such pride in what they produce. To this

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