

Never stop growing:
Simplify gardening to save time, save money and defy age

A. Start from a basis in reality

What do you have out there now? Look to change whole areas to lower care.

Lawn requires 8 minutes work per month per 100 square feet

Trees, shrubs, groundcover, 10-12 minutes per month per 100 square feet

Annual flowers, 15-20 minutes per month per 100 square feet

Perennial garden, 60 minutes per month per 100 square feet

Everything needs more than average time in spring, less in summer

Find a busiest-time helper or swap time with family and friends.

Choose for *types* of work you like, e.g., groundcovers if you're not a weed-er;
compact, shrubby plants if you're not a stake-r.

About money...

It can cost money to buy time; spend wisely. (More on this, further along.)

100 sq. ft. of perennial garden: \$200-360 labor, \$130-300 in plants & materials

Cheaper labor can be costly in unexpected ways. Hire smarter, not cheaper.

Power tools *may* save time but often do not, and there are hidden costs.

B. Continuing to grow as the years add up

We interviewed 15 gardeners with a combined gardening career of +900 years.

Why keep on?

We asked, "Why do you keep at this? What keeps you growing?"

I love flowers, watching things grow.

I HAVE to. A way of life, the farmer in me.

My reason to get up and out, every day each season. I relax out there.

How to keep growing? The consensus:

We asked, "What's made it possible for you to keep going?"

What can you tell us to help in our changing situations, changing abilities?"

1) Keep a good perspective:

Don't fret.

About names of plants. Used to know, don't now? So what?!

Always more to do? Right! It's never done and that's okay!

Can't wait for spring? Use every season. Plan, clean, start seeds.

Change your standards.

Ask for or hire help. Explain what you want. Accept what's done.

Take your glasses off -- maybe that weed is really a wild beauty!

Shrink the home garden. Garden elsewhere with a group.

Volunteer at a park, nature center, or join a community garden.

Differently abled people to share the work.

A beautiful result and you're fully a part of it.

2) Take care of yourself:

Don't ever stop. Go out every day. Exercise.

Know your limits. Rest between.

Sit. (Chair, bucket, milk crate.) Be at rest, even while weeding, watering.

Make things more accessible. Make more, wider, firmer paths.

3) Use good tools.

Sharp. Sharp edges literally *cut* the work. Buy a honing stone and file.

Lightweight, with padded & rotating handles. Fit to your hand & height:

Long handles for reach and leverage.

Forks. Several tines rather than one blade for digging.

Wheels. Don't carry what can roll. Fiberglass wheelbarrow / cart, *air tires*.

Knee pads, portable or built-in. Spread the weight, save the knee.

There is no one list of best tools. Try things, find what's right for *you*.

A simple, standard kit of tools: Air-tire wheelbarrow, 5-gallon bucket, small tarp, weeder, trowel, pruners, folding saw, spade, fork, rake, tarp

4) Be smarter in choosing plants. Aim for lower care.

If it doesn't grow well, get rid of it.

If it must be staked, use a staking *kit*. May cost more, but worth it!

Landscape plants simpler than "garden" plants.

Worthwhile: Natives, drought resistance, disease resistance.

5) Modify designs.

Get design help. Map out specific ways to simplify particular areas.

Raise plants to your comfort level. Seriously raised beds, stands for pots.

Use more non-plants for color. Flags, statues, bird baths, rocks!

Use containers to add flower color. Plastic, not ceramic or stone.

Make water more readily available. Water systems can cost but save.

C. Devil's in the details -- tips rated #1 by various experts:

Start earlier in spring, work later in fall. Every hour then saves 2-3 in summer.

Bundle, then cut. Keep twigs for stakes, might even place them in fall.

Buy plants and have materials delivered only when and where you need them.

Do it when you think of it. Don't be ruled by "garden calendars!"

Dispense with non-essential tasks:

Prune harder, less often.

Stop spraying. Just stop; allow Nature to select the fittest.

Prune perennials harder, more often. Dump the sick, disappointing & invasive.

Prune more in the off-season, less while shrubs and trees are growing.

Cut less in fall and as beds evolve; allow Nature to help the fittest take over.

Fertilize *less* often, use slow-release products. Soil test, then stick to 1 fertilizer.

Root barriers! Save time, might cost to begin with but worth it.

Restrain the urge for constant change and novelty.

Establish several mini-compost sites around the yard, and sheet-compost too.

Define your goals for the day and stick to them. Walk and look before you work
Work in one-hour segments, starting in high-visibility, fun areas.

Exercise... preventing injury

Older? Beware dizzies. Lean (cane, cart, sturdy object) rather than bend.

Back help: Bend your knees! Use more of your body - especially your legs.

Move smooth, don't jerk. Be "The Graceful Gardener."

Choose tools that fit the job, your size and ability.

Protect your arms, wrists and hands:

Learn the neutral position for wrist and thumb, in line with arm.

Hug-carry, don't pinch-carry.

Stab and draw with a trowel, don't burrow and lift.

Vary your motions: Change which hand and *which foot* you use.

Plant small and water small.

Water early in the season for less water overall.

Know more about your soil -- dig some holes, do a drainage test.

Mulch! Start with clean beds. Smother weedy areas. Recycle all clippings as mulch.

Use what you grow: Vegetables, wood, yard waste...

Design for low maintenance:

Better "bones," including wider paths and built-in maintenance paths.

Fewer edges, checked from the start to be sure they're mow-able.

Do more with shrubs, groundcover (bulbs). If it works, mass it!

Use long-lived clumping species that thrive, not just survive on your site.

Use plants that will *mature* at the size you desire, so they are low-prune.

Design with higher contrast in plant combos, so weeds can't hide.

Place highest-maintenance areas closest to your eye and seat.