

Gardening Adaptations for People with Gripping and Lifting Problems

E. Throckmorton and J. Powell

Arthritis, neurological problems, waning strength, and other conditions can cause problems with grip, grasp, or lifting. These problems can be frustrating for the gardener. Pots are heavy and clumsy; tools don't fit the problem hand, and moving potted plants can be challenging. Here are some tips to help gardeners better deal with these problems.

Pick the Best Container

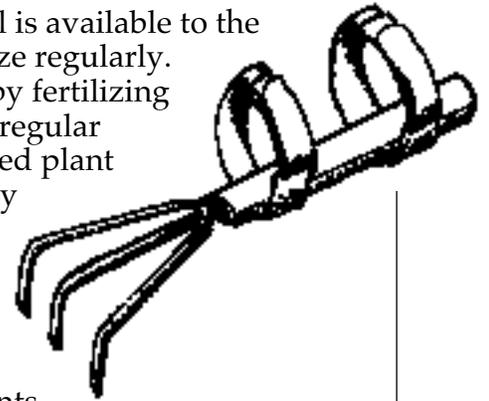
Select containers that will meet the needs of the plants you plan to grow. Plants need root space, drainage facilities, a porous, fertile soil mix, and support.

Put Your Containers on a Diet

Standard clay pots, which provide good drainage and breathing ability, are heavy. If weight is a problem, use plastic flower pots or other plastic containers. Small plants can be grown in yogurt or cottage cheese containers. Larger plants can be planted in plastic buckets, giving the added advantage of a handle for lifting or carrying. Be sure to cut drainage holes in any non-standard plant container or place a soil-sweetening agent such as charcoal in the bottom of the container. Up to half the soil in the container can be replaced with styrofoam packing nubbins.

1. Place the nubbins in the bottom of the container.

2. Cover with nylon net or other netting to hold the soil in place without slowing drainage.
3. Use regular potting soil and plant flowers, shrubs, or vegetables as usual.
4. Since less soil is available to the plants, fertilize regularly. Experiment by fertilizing weekly with regular strength potted plant fertilizer or by watering regularly with a weaker solution.



Different plants have different needs. Use trial and error to find out what works. You may need to stake larger plants more firmly than usual because of the shallow soil.

You should water more frequently. Adding styrofoam provides additional drainage, and the smaller amount of soil will dry faster.

Adapt Your Tools

Tools can be adapted to individual needs. Cut foam rubber sheeting to size and tape it around handles to give a wider grip area. Wooden adapters may

Edith Throckmorton, Master Gardener volunteer, and Jan Powell, education program assistant, Oregon Master Gardener Program, Oregon State University.



MAKING GARDENING EASIER

be found in hardware stores. Cut replacement handles for hoes and rakes to size for the person with bending problems. Try taping children's garden tools to broomstick handles cut to appropriate lengths.

You can use polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe to make seed sowing easier.

1. Make a diagonal cut at one end of the pipe to scratch a row for planting seeds.
2. Feed the seeds down the pipe into the row, spacing the seeds as you draw the pipe along.
3. Turn the pipe over to cover the row of seed with soil. You don't need to stoop or kneel.

Other Ideas

Other adaptations, such as raised beds, provide gardening space for persons with physical limitations. A determined gardener will find a solution to almost any problem.

For More Information

For more information on the Master Gardener Horticultural Therapy Program, write the Oregon State University Extension Service, Oregon Master Gardener Program, 211 S.E. 80th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97215.

Other Publications

Other titles available in the "Making Gardening Easier" set are:

- Foster, S., Duvall, C., and J. Powell, *Adaptive Gardening Techniques for the Visually Impaired*. Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8498, (Corvallis, 1992).
- Jewell, M., and Powell, J., *Gardening Hints for People with Arthritis*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8499 (Corvallis, 1992).
- Foster, S., and Powell, J., *Gardening Strategies for People with Heart and Lung Problems*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8501 (Corvallis, 1992).
- Foster, S., and Powell, J., *Gardening Ideas for Children with Special Needs*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8502 (Corvallis, 1992).
- McNeilan, R.A., and Powell, J., *Therapeutic Benefits of Gardening*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8503 (Corvallis, 1992).
- Throckmorton, E., and Powell, J., *Adapting Garden Tools to Overcome Physical Challenges*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8504 (Corvallis, 1992).
- Rogers, P., and Powell, J., *Gardening with Limited Range of Motion*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8505 (Corvallis, 1992).

Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, O.E. Smith, director. This publication was produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties.



Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials—without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability—as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.