

# Family Gardening:

## Creating Good Nutrition, Togetherness and Exercise for Healthy Minds and Bodies

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Meet and shake the hands of any prairie gardener and you will notice a strong grip, along with toned muscles of the arms, back, stomach and legs. Even with every conceivable gardening convenience available today, gardening still provides a modest workout. In addition to the healthful benefits of gardening as a form of exercise, it also establishes a modest pride of independently providing for self and family, and freeing one from the total dependence of someone else doing the thinking and work for you.

Did your parents or grandparents garden? If so, then very likely you, too, are a gardener or wannabe gardener. Just what is meant by the term “gardening”? To me, it always has involved anything done out of doors that can be related to plants: digging, mowing, raking, tree and shrub trimming, turning the compost pile, weeding, hoeing and much more.

My parents were avid gardeners. In fact, the entire neighborhood I grew up in was a series of friendly competitive “Victory Gardens.” As a kid, I needed gentle prodding from my father to get involved in gardening. His tactic was, “If you want to eat, you have to learn how to grow some of your own food, and there is nothing like hands-on training.” Gradually, I got into Victory Gardening (aka “war gardens”) and enjoyed the fruits of our labor: fresh tomatoes, peppers, beans, sweet corn, cabbage and more. As neighbors, we’d get together and have a fall festival in someone’s backyard, each bringing some of his or her own produce to share. It was great and, unlike many a youth of today, I grew up enjoying eating vegetables. I still do, eating my potatoes completely, skin and all.

Did our parents make mistakes in gardening like many of us do? Of course! F.F. Rockwell, writing in the Feb. 6, 1943, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, provided a listing of the common mistakes beginning gardeners make and are commonly made today:

- Starting too late in the spring
- Attempting too much
- Growing only those vegetables you like best
- Planting everything at one time
- No plan for succession crops
- Failing to plant winter crops
- Not growing vegetables in full sun



A recent study by Barbara Ainsworth and associates showed that an individual expends as much energy performing certain gardening tasks as he or she would participating in recommended exercise routines. In addition, small-scale gardening diverts the mind from work, family conflicts and other stresses that are faced in everyday life.

Gardening - the nurturing part of it – satisfies the human instinct we all have for providing care. Nothing is more rewarding than harvesting sweet corn or fresh tomatoes at the end of the growing season from a garden that has been attended to by family members working together.

The obesity epidemic in our country could get knocked out if kids got involved in the outdoor gardening chores. Give them guidelines, responsibility and authority over a portion of their own garden patch. Start small. Consider square foot gardening. One 4-foot by 4-foot-square (16 square feet) area can provide an amazing amount of produce if the techniques outlined in the book by the same name are followed.

What are the calories burned in typical gardening activities? It varies, of course, with each person, with the larger person (200 pounds-plus) burning more than a smaller individual

(150 pounds or less), but some typical comparisons to chew on are:

30 Minutes of:	Burns
Raking and bagging leaves .....	162 calories
Mowing (push with motor) .....	182 calories
Trimming shrubs (manual) .....	182 calories
Digging, spading, tilling, laying sod, general gardening .....	202 calories
Mower (push, no motor) .....	243 calories

This is all well and good, but in the upper Midwest, we have a few winter days that gardening cannot be carried out, so don't give up your membership at the local gym. You need to stay fit for the gardening season with proper warm-ups; stretching; lifting moderate weights; and doing crunches, pushups and squats. This, too, is something that the entire family can get involved in and will carry them into the gardening season. Just don't overdo it if you are just starting out.

For more information about gardening, visit [www.ag.ndsu.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu)  
Click on "Home – Lawn – Garden – Trees."

**Research shows that children are more likely to eat their fruits and vegetables if the produce is homegrown. In interviews with 1,600 parents of preschool children in rural Missouri, researchers reported that children who were served homegrown vegetables were twice as likely to meet the daily recommendation.**

