



Disability Services

Information Sheet

Gardening

A favourite past time for many people is the activity of gardening. Unfortunately, maintaining a beautiful garden can sometimes be physically demanding and time consuming.

There are many strategies and assistive devices which can be used to make gardening tasks easier and safer.

You may also wish to enquire at your local council or service regarding your eligibility for assistance with garden tasks and maintenance, or consider paying for help.



Garden Design

Consider adapting the garden environment to make it more manageable:

- ▶ Minimise the size and number of high maintenance garden beds. Raised garden beds, large pots or urns and plant pots can reduce the need for bending. They may be built into the garden or may be portable on wheeled frames for ease of manoeuvring.
- ▶ Pull-down hanging garden pots can be lowered to an accessible height for maintenance and watering. Self-watering pots may also help to reduce the frequency of watering required.
- ▶ Place paths in the most direct route and consider installing wider paths to allow access with a mobility aid if required. Use slip-resistant, flat paving or concrete. Avoid gravel which can be dangerous to walk on and may require additional maintenance. Mark edges of steps and changes in ground heights with a contrasting colour and place rails alongside steps or ramps to provide additional support. Ensure adequate lighting levels by using outdoor sensor lights, solar lights or garden lights.
- ▶ Eliminate tripping hazards by repairing cracked paths and level uneven areas. Rake up and remove fallen leaves and sweep paths regularly. Put tools away after use, return the hose to its holder or gather it into a neat pile near the tap. Keep overhanging shrubs and trees well trimmed. Look out for pets before moving around the garden. Encourage family members to pick up belongings such as toys and balls.
- ▶ Consider self-watering systems such as drippers which reduce standing time and the effort required to carry watering cans and squeeze trigger nozzles. Tap timers can be fitted to garden taps, which will automatically turn on and off.

- ▶ Where possible keep garden beds, tool storage, work surfaces and water sources close together.

Plant selection

- ▶ For a low-maintenance garden, consider native plants and avoid plants that require a lot of care (such as pruning or fertilising). Replace annual plants with perennial species that do not need replanting, and choose drought tolerant species that require less watering. Reduce weeding by selecting ground cover plants or thickly planted perennials, mulching or using chemical control.
- ▶ Regular mulching of garden beds can reduce ongoing maintenance by maintaining soil moisture content, inhibiting weed growth and decreasing watering requirements.
- ▶ Lawns are demanding on time and physical ability, requiring regular mowing and edging. Consider replacing lawns with ground covers, paving or mulched areas. Synthetic grass may provide a natural looking low-maintenance substitute. Alternatively, re-plant with a grass species that requires less mowing. If lawn is necessary, set the lawnmower at a high cutting level, as lawns grow slower if left longer.

Ergonomics

Maintaining good body posture is important for reducing the risk of injury and strain.

- ▶ Where possible, avoid reaching above head height and bending to ground level. Bending down can create rounding of the back and increase stress on the spine and nerves. Use long-handled tools and work in an upright posture. When working down low, place one knee on the ground with a straight back, or use a kneeler or stool. Ensure joints are not locked, particularly when standing.
- ▶ When lifting, keep the back straight and bend at the hips and knees. Place hands underneath the object and straighten the knees when rising, keeping the back straight and holding the load close to the body with elbows bent. Consider dividing large bags of fertiliser or soil into smaller loads or use a wheelbarrow.

Equipment and Tools

Appropriate tool selection can reduce effort and help maintain good posture.

- ▶ Small lightweight tools conserve energy and may be easier to lift and manipulate. Lightweight materials such as plastic, cane or aluminium are useful for those with decreased strength. Some tools can be adapted for left-handed use and others modified for one-handed use with hook and loop tape.
- ▶ Consider the handle of the tool. Thick, slip-resistant handles and grips can make tools easier to hold, particularly for those with weak or limited grasp. To increase handle circumference, consider adding tubular foam, bicycle grips or tennis racquet tape. Tools with angled handles assist with maintaining a neutral wrist and hand position.
- ▶ Look for tools with a ratchet mechanism. Ratchet secateurs cut in stages rather than requiring continuous grip force to complete the cut. Pruners are also available where the lower handle rotates with the fingers as it is squeezed, which is designed to reduce friction on the skin.

- ▶ Long-handled tools reduce the need to bend and reach and can be used when standing or sitting. Some have length-adjustable handles with interchangeable tool heads. Options include weeders, edge trimmers, loppers, trowels, forks, a potted plant lifter and handled fruit pickers with telescopic handles which are designed to pick fruit and catch them in a collection bag. A long-handled reaching aid or a long-handled dustpan and brush can be used to pick up garden rubbish. Long-handled watering wands assist with watering hanging garden baskets and reduce the need to climb ladders or stools. A range of handle lengths are available.
- ▶ An auxiliary handle part way down the shaft of a long-handled tool can improve leverage and provide a firmer grip. These are available in "D" shaped and pistol grip shaped handles. A forearm crutch can be adapted for use as a gardening tool to provide forearm support and a stable grip.
- ▶ Cordless, battery powered hand tools have recently entered the market. Many are powered by lithium batteries and options include secateurs, small hedge trimmers and shrub shears.
- ▶ When planting new plants, long-handled BBQ tongs or a reacher can be used to pick up and place seedlings and smaller plants. A bulb planter allows soil to be lifted and replaced quickly and easily.
- ▶ Lightweight wheelbarrows can reduce the risk of back injury. Two-wheeled models rather than one may be easier to use as the load is spread through the wheels over a larger surface area, rather than through the handles.
- ▶ Garden kneelers can be useful for those with difficulty standing for long periods of time or rising from a kneeling position. When used as a kneeler, they provide arm supports to assist with standing up and have soft padding for comfort. Some can be reversed to form a low stool to assist with completing gardening tasks within low garden beds.
- ▶ Hose holders assist when unable to stand for long periods to water, and enable the gardener to do other tasks. A coil style hose stretches out when used around the garden, and automatically returns into place for storage.
- ▶ Tool belts, carry bags and garden aprons are a good way to move small tools around the garden. Yard carts and wheelbarrows can be used for larger items.
- ▶ Garden tap turners are designed to provide leverage or an increased grip size when turning on and off taps.

Other tips:

- ▶ Before a gardening session, begin with gentle stretches and warm up exercises. Plan ahead and organise the required tools and equipment before starting.
- ▶ Spread strenuous jobs out over hours, days or weeks. Take frequent breaks and vary hard tasks with less demanding tasks. Change positions frequently to reduce the risk of overstressing any one part of the body.
- ▶ If a walking aid is used for mobility, ensure it is used in the garden to avoid falls. Wear appropriate shoes with a flat, slip-resistant sole and create a plan on what to do to gain assistance if a fall does occur.
- ▶ Recognise your abilities and limitations. Stop to ask for help if required.

Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre

11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Fax: 8266 5263

Email: ilcsa@dfc.sa.gov.au

Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus routes:

From the city T500/T501 or
207/208 to Stop 28 Sudholz Road

Timetable information: 8210 1000

