

Considerations in assessing your gardening ability

By **Laura DePrado**
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Last month I introduced three considerations in assessing your gardening limitations: Time, mobility and ability.

These considerations will help you maximize the safety and enjoyment of your gardening experience. I discussed time and mobility and reserved discussing ability for this month's installment.

Determining your ability will help you make judgments about basic garden components and types of equipment. Ability factors will help determine what type of gardening is practical. Traditional ground-level gardening may be working just fine for you now, but your ability to do this will not last forever. Here are some considerations for you to keep in mind:

First, can you get down to the floor or ground and get back up without assistance?

If all you need are knee pads, consider yourself fortunate. Chances are, however, that if you tried gardening from a comfortable standing position

using light-weight long-handled tools, you most likely would find it easier.

Second, do you have any back problems or limited balance or coordination? Do you rely on a cane to get around and up and down but are still able to walk long distances? Level surfaces become more important. If you cannot walk long distances either with or without adaptive devices, then you may want to consider keeping frequently visited garden areas that need more attention closer to your dwelling. Include a place to sit and be comfortable if you can.

Third, can you stand on one foot, or is it challenging? How are you walking up steps or inclines? If you use crutches, cane or walker, the ability to carry things becomes more important. Equipment to help you carry tools and plants becomes a consideration.

How are you going to carry a hose or a watering can? If you use an assistive device for walking, consider that you will need to adapt. Raised planters or containers will make gardening



Laura DePrado, horticultural therapy practitioner and horticultural specialist, shown at the Children's Garden at Legacy Health in Portland, Ore., in October 2012.

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more accessible.

Fourth, ask yourself how long you can comfortably stand on your own. If you are more comfortable seated, there are many adaptive tools and meth-

ods to bring your garden to you. Here are some considerations on how to make this possible:

» Seating should be positioned at intervals throughout and around

the garden.

» Use vertical techniques.

» Use adaptive tools that help you to reach while standing for a short period of time.

I will be writing about adaptive tools next month. Consider having a lightweight seat with you. Reaching tools and aids will do the reaching for you when you can't do it yourself.

Have you considered a raised bed so that soil, plants and planting are at an accessible height? Making the soil just 1 foot higher in a traditional planter box will make gardening easier for the seated gardener, if you can still bend safely at the waist. If you are in a wheelchair, whether it is temporary or permanent, ground-level gardening is difficult. The paraplegic who has lost use of his legs can participate with little or no special equipment. Tools that extend reach will work well. Level surfaces without steps are essential.

If you have increased weakness in your arms and/or hands from arthritis, gloves and padded

tools are good. Gripping aides, wrist supports and smaller lightweight tools are great adaptive supplements to heavy, long handle, traditional tools.

Fifth, visual impairment affects every aspect of gardening. Safe unobstructed flat surfaces are essential to prevent tripping hazards. Tools with bright-colored handles are considerations. Use plants and plant combinations with bright, dramatic colors, form and textural contrast.

We all have similarities and differences in our abilities and limitations in the garden and in our gardening positions. There are many ways to compensate for limitations, but understanding the three basic considerations as discussed will make it possible for adapting and modifying design space, tasks, tools and equipment.

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