



THE GARDEN GIRL

CAROLINE BROOME

It's no secret that gardening is good for you. The internet is rife with websites extolling its health benefits, celebrity gardeners are writing books about it, doctors are prescribing it. Fresh air and exercise are good for mental and physical well-being. But this got me thinking: How can we continue to enjoy the health benefits of gardening as we get older?

I've been gardening for three decades now. But at 64 I'm not getting any younger, so I'm having to re-evaluate how I garden, in order to continue reaping its benefits for years to come. Adapt or die, as the saying goes! Same applies to all of us. Advancing age, injury or physical disabilities needn't stop you gardening.

I find a couple of hours at a time is enough for me, so it pays to be well prepared. Before you start work on your garden, walk around your plot and decide what needs doing. Prioritise. Think of this as a warmup, maybe doing some stretches, then gather the tools you'll need around you. A tool belt is a real boon for this if you're anything like me for putting tools down in the borders and not being able to find them again. It also spares you from having to keep getting up and down to fetch things, which plays havoc with the knees. Trousers with built in kneepads are a must-have: Not for me the elasticated monstrosities that stop the blood supply to your calves and slip down your shins the minute you stand up! I often hear friends say, "I've got no problem getting down, it's the getting up that's the killer!" Kneelers with handles can help with this.

Try to avoid spending too much time in one position, which may cause aches or stiffness. Divide your time between kneeling and stretching, so that you are working your muscles evenly, building strength, flexibility and balance. Hands-on tasks like seed sowing or potting on will aid manual dexterity. And take regular breaks: We all know to take a break from our computer screens

at regular intervals, so why shouldn't this apply to working outside?

One of the most labour-intensive jobs in the garden is clearing up, which can take as long as the job itself. So rather than rushing around at the end of a session when you are probably ready for a break, find a chair or a kneeler, put the radio on, and as you finish one task, chop it up and clear it away before moving onto the next.

Labour saving tools are a must. I favour Wolfgarten's Multi-Change Tools (worldofwolf.co.uk) because they have detachable handles which come in all different lengths, ideal if you struggle to bend. If your grip isn't what it was then there are tools with add-on grip handles. Save your back by placing heavy pots onto wheeled pot movers, (goes without saying to get help lifting them on in the first place!) Install lawn edging (everedge.co.uk) to keep your lawn edges from running into your borders. If you are going in for a re-design then raised beds and troughs will make life so much easier. The gardening charity Thrive has a mine of information (thrive.org.uk/get-gardening/why-gardening-is-good-for-your-health).

Your choice of plants makes a big difference to how you garden. I've always favoured herbaceous borders with hardy perennials as the main focal point, however as I get older I'm inclining towards plants that are lower maintenance. Shrubs and evergreens need far less attention but can reward you with year-round interest: fragrance and flowers, attractive foliage, autumn colour, ornamental bark and stems in winter. Conifers are making a comeback. Making bold changes can be very liberating!

It's all too easy to feel isolated, especially in the winter months, if you live alone, are less able bodied, new to the area. Don't be shy about asking for help. Get in touch with London's specialist environmental college Capel Manor College in Enfield (capel.ac.uk) to see if any of the students would like to help you in your garden, while they would no doubt benefit from your wealth of experience. Enlist young relatives to help you; after all, they are the gardeners of the future. It's no coincidence that local nurseries and garden centres do a roaring trade in their cafes, their clientele, shall we say, all of a certain age, all bored at being stuck at home on wet or wintry days. Why not join your local horticultural society (I would say that wouldn't I as Chair of HGS Hort Soc! Contact hgs.membership@virginmedia.com) or join the allotment society, hgstrust.org/trust-property/allotments.shtml, where you can share your love of gardening with like-minded neighbours.

Gardening Kneeler



Keep on Gardening!



Hort Soc update

MARJORIE HARRIS

2023 looks set to be a bumper year for the Horticultural Society, with a wonderful three-day trip to Wales planned for July and other coach trips to RHS Wisley and Cambridge Botanic Gardens set to roll in April and October. Coronation Day has inspired a red, white and blue theme for adults and juniors at the June Show and, whatever the weather throws at growers of the real thing, people of all ages can enter the brand new Paper Flower Competition at the show.

Joining Hort Soc is easy; just contact membership secretary David Broome on HGS.membership@virginmedia.com (8444 2329) or go to hgs.org.uk/hortsoc/ for details of how to join and the latest information on what is happening in nearly every month of the year. Many meetings and events and entry to the flower shows are free to members, you will receive a handbook and quarterly newsletter and get discounts at several garden centres including Sunshine and Finchley Nurseries. We would love more children and young people to take part in the junior classes at the shows (membership for under-18s and entry is free). We are also looking for volunteers to help with developing social media and new ideas and to join the Hort Soc committee.

The Horticultural Society manages the large flowerbed outside Fellowship House in Willifield Way. In 2009 we planted a tree there to celebrate our centenary and it seemed to thrive. Sadly the 2022 Autumn gales split it down the middle, made it unstable and dangerous, and it had to be removed by Barnet. This has provided us with the space and opportunity to plant a new tree to mark the death and celebrate the life of the late Queen Elizabeth II. We will be planting an Amelanchier Lamarckii, a tree with beautiful spring blossom for everyone to enjoy, in her honour very soon.

Colourful low maintenance shrubbery (Photos: Caroline Broome)

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