

Gardening After Joint Replacement

Gardening brings lots of benefits. Kindness to joints isn't one of them.

But a joint replacement or related problem, like arthritis, doesn't have to keep you from any activity that you love, says Suzanne Graziano, R.N., the restorative nursing director for 5 South Orthopedics and the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging and Rehabilitation.

"Gardening is a lovely activity that can be utilized as exercise, and it provides people with emotional peace," Graziano says.

People coming out of joint replacement surgery ask her all the time if they can pick up their shovels again. Her answer: Yes ... but with moderation. Here are her suggestions:

Invest in some new tools. Look for shovels, spades and hoes with long handles to avoid bending over. Look for tools with special grips to keep the hands from slipping and stressing the wrists. And gardening stools are a good way to stay off of your knees.



Take breaks. Every 20 minutes or so, stop what you're doing, move around and stretch. Heck, it's not like up north with its tiny growing-season window. Florida sun shines year-round. Pace yourself.

Start small. You don't need to landscape your whole yard or harvest bushels of vegetables during your recovery.

Consider containers. Raised beds or container gardening puts less stress on the joints.

Get help. You don't need to lug those big bags of top soil! Ask a family member for assis-

e. Or ask the neighborhood teens if they need to perform volunteer work as a graduation requirement. An afternoon of assistance might just benefit both of you.

Getting your body garden-ready starts well before you are ready to plant your first seeds. Talk to your physical and occupational therapists during your recovery stage. Tell him or her about all of your activities. Therapists can design exercises to get you ready to return to the garden, the green, the tennis courts or any other favorite place. "With proper guidance, proper therapy and allowing your body to heal with time, you can enjoy your favorite pastimes," Graziano says.