

Adaptive Gardening for Seniors



What is Adaptive Gardening?

Adaptive Gardening is modifying the tools and methods you use so that you may continue gardening into your senior years. By making some modifications to how you do things, you can minimize your risk of falls and reduce stress on your joints and lower back.

Pride comes before the fall.

According to the CDC, accidental falls are a leading cause of non-fatal injuries and progressive disability for seniors living in the United States – which basically means that the surest way to end up not being able to enjoy your home and yard is to start out with an attitude of, “I've been gardening for years! I know what I'm doing, I don't have to adapt anything!” By being honest with yourself and adapting your activities appropriately, you can continue doing things you enjoy.

Creating a Plan

How much do you have to modify? Can you make a plan to scale down your activities over several years? Adaptation doesn't mean immediately going from what you've always done to a wheelchair accessible tabletop container garden, it just means making little changes every year to adapt your activities to your changing body. This presentation will present several options, including information on adapting an existing garden for senior use, adaptive gardening tools and container gardening.

Adapting an existing garden

It is possible to reduce trip hazards in your hard. With the help of children, grandchildren, or landscapers, you can make your yard a much safer place by following these simple guidelines:

- Fill in any divets in the lawn, and remove any stray timbers or stones left-over from old landscaping projects.
- Use a Rolling Garden Stool for sitting, and as an aid when getting back up to your feet (tie a rope to the end of your stool so you don't have to end over to drag it)
- Make the paths between your vegetable rows extra-wide.
- Always wear sneakers or work boots with good tread on the soles. Don't go out to your garden in old canvas sneakers or slippers.
- Avoid using any metal, or sharply pointed objects as row markers.



Further Adaptations

It's a good idea to begin keeping some plants in pots. Due to the exploding critter population in Central New York, you'll have better luck with some fruits and vegetables if you keep them close to your house, where animals are less likely to approach them. Plants that are ideal for keeping in pots include carrots, beats, peppers, spinach, salad greens and bush beans.

Salad bowl gardening in containers

<https://pender.ces.ncsu.edu/2012/09/plant-a-salad-bowl-garden/>

How to start a salad bowl garden

<https://balconygardenweb.com/how-to-start-a-salad-bowl-garden/>

Filling in the old Garden Patch

If you decide to move to containers, rake your old garden patch smooth, and fill it in with shrubs, pines or hardy perennials so you don't create more mowing.



You may be starting out with something like this



And you'll be going to something
like this



Or maybe more like this:



The “Cadillac” option



If you expect to be in your home for many more years, or plan to leave it to a family member, you may want to invest in raised planter beds. Many hardware stores sell prefabricated units at assorted price points. Installation can be costly if you have it done by a professional. This is not a viable option for everyone due to the large initial investment. A better option for most seniors is to use smaller pots and planters and build a little bit at a time.

Container Gardening

Some fruits and vegetables do well in containers. Carrots, radishes, some cabbages and peppers all do very well in tall, narrow clay pots. Keeping these vegetables close to the house also improves your chances of getting to enjoy your produce before the deer, rabbits and woodchucks do. Seed catalogs will often specify which varieties of produce are best for container planting.



Salad Bowl Gardens

Many Central New York gardeners have given up on salad greens because of critters, but salad greens do very well in pots or planters, and look great on your deck or patio. Just fill a large planter with a light springy soil blend, and follow the instructions on the seed packet.



Where to find new ideas

- Even if you live in the country, you can find new ideas for container gardening projects in publications and on websites devoted to city gardening. Try search strings like “rooftop gardening plants” to find new ideas.



Adaptive Gardening Tools

- Many garden tools are now available with large diameter, padded or curved handles to adapt to older hands. Look around at your local garden center for tools designed specifically for seniors.



The Review

- Get a friend or family members to help you smooth out uneven ground and remove any old bricks or timbers that could become trip hazards.
- Wear shoes that have plenty of tread left on the soles – avoid old worn out sneakers.
- Move some plants into pots and keep them close to your house where animals won't bother them.
- Enjoy the ease of container gardening.

Review

- Consider creating a salad bowl garden, and experiment with putting different kinds of plants together in pots to create attractive patio plantings.
- Look at city and container gardening publications and websites for new planter projects.
- Ask at your hardware store for tools that are adapted for seniors.