

## **After A Long Hard Winter**

Margaret Howard, Community Relations Manager  
Life Guidance Services

After a long and hard winter, summer has finally arrived here in West Michigan! The warm weather and sunshine filled days offer a much needed respite for all of us, but especially for those who fill the role of caregiver for a friend or loved one. For caregivers, finding time to relax and rejuvenate is critical, but making this time for oneself can often times be a very real challenge. One summer activity in particular, may be the perfect fit for both you and the one you are caring for...**gardening!**

The beauty of gardening is that there is something for everyone! Whether you have a small area in your yard, planters on your patio, or potted plants on a window sill, gardening may offer you that sense of peace and solitude you so need as a caregiver. The following are some tips from the television show "Rebecca's Garden"...

### **Rebecca's Gardening Tips for Seniors**

With a little assistance and creativity, seniors can continue to enjoy the kind of gardening that they've always loved, says "Rebecca's Garden" star Rebecca Kolls. Following are six tips for seniors and the family caregivers who help them.

1. Herbs grow anywhere and are great for seasoning. Kitchen herb gardens are wonderful for seniors. The more you pinch and pick the herbs, such as basil, parsley and chives, the more vigorous they grow.
2. Think height, filler and spiller. When you're creating flowerpots, consider height, filler and spiller. Plant a variety that will grow at least two times as tall as the container, fill in with plants that will grow to no more than half of the height of the taller plants, and then plant a variety that will cascade down.
3. When it comes to annuals, pack them in. When you create flowerpots, pack your annuals in because they will become root-bound and grow up and over the pots. You'll get drama and a beautiful arrangement.
4. Look for equipment that can make the job easier. There are many wonderful tools available that can make gardening easier for anyone including seniors. Bud-Eze tools, which can be found on the Internet, are a good option, as are bionic gloves ([www.bionicgloves.com](http://www.bionicgloves.com)), according to Kolls. In addition, the Arthritis Foundation has a product and services directory for senior gardeners and others with mobility problems. Log on to [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org).
5. Garden right outside your front door or back door. Container gardening allows seniors access to flowers or vegetables in one pot and also gives them the height that helps make gardening easier for them. Team with others to garden.
6. If a senior can't garden anymore, enlist the help of others who might enjoy sharing the work and any produce or flowers from the garden.

### **Additional gardening tips include:**

1. Water Conservation—Don't throw away that old hose that has sprung a leak. Drill or hammer holes every 6 inches or so along the entire hose and use it as a "soaker hose". Consider purchasing a rain barrel that collects water from your downspout and allows you to recycle this water back into your garden.

2. Mulch—Mulching helps keep weeds to a minimum, keeps plants from drying out, and looks fantastic. Many stores sell small 20lb bags which allows you to purchase just the amount you need.
3. Mix it up!—Gardening in small spaces even works for fruits and veggies! Peppers, tomatoes, and a variety of berry plants can be planted in planters on your patio!
4. Deadheading—Cut off dead flowers to stimulate growth of new flowers all summer long!
5. Create a habitat!—Consider planting flowers that will attract butterflies and birds! Varieties such as butterfly bush, bee balm, aster, coreopsis, hollyhock, and coneflower are just some examples of flowers that attract these flying beauties! Adding a birdbath will add hours of enjoyment as well!
6. Composting—Composting allows you to enrich the soil in which your plants grow, providing them with the nitrogen that is so important. Don't throw away your kitchen scraps -- add them to the compost pile. Kitchen scraps are typically high in nitrogen, which helps heat up the compost pile and speed up the composting process. Egg shells, coffee grounds, fruit and vegetable peels and scraps are all outstanding materials to add.

Well, whether you're a seasoned gardener with a green thumb, or giving this a try for the first time, the garden you choose to create will offer you hours of enjoyment for you and the one you care for! So why not give it a try and watch your garden grow!

***Caregiver's Corner*** is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.caregiverresource.net](http://www.caregiverresource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.