

# **The Joy of Gardening for the Caregiver**

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Gardening is a great outdoor activity, with results that can last throughout the year. The benefits to the caregiver are moderate exercise, stress relief, visible results from an effort given, and a very real change of scenery. Spending a little time thinking through a personalized gardening plan is well worth the time. Some considerations are as follows.

## ***Begin planting early***

Planting bulbs for early spring plants must be done in the fall. If there is a desire to plant from seedlings, they can get a good start indoors. Trays and seed can be purchased at any local gardening center. A small indoor area with proper lighting is all that is needed. This can be started in mid winter for a spring planting.

## ***Make planning a priority***

Decide what types of plants bring the greatest satisfaction. Perennials give lasting beauty each year. Some will require thinning in order to grow well. Annuals can easily be included but will need to be purchased yearly and removed at the end of the growing season.

The use of a journal is helpful in tracking the yearly plan. Record plant names, locations, and future ideas in the journal. Also, record your feelings and how your efforts enhanced your life. Journaling makes for some great reading during the winter months. There is something about summer memories that seem to warm the spirit during the long days of winter.

## ***Use your space wisely***

Take advantage of areas that are easily visible. Entry areas are good places to place flower pots and hanging baskets. Walk ways are visible areas for both residents and visitors. Decks are great for potted flowers along with strawberries, tomatoes, and peppers. Freshly grown vegetables are a special joy as part of a summer meal. They can be grown in small spaces used wisely. Hanging baskets are good additions to areas near windows.

## ***A life case study: thoughts from my mother, a caregiver for my father, who is living with dementia.***

Q. Tell me the value of having flowers around your place?

A. Flowers are cheerful and uplifting and I have an opportunity to be creative with my hands. It is great therapy!

Q. What types do you find most satisfying?

A. I enjoy Impatiens, Wax Begonias, bright Petunias, Roses, Tulips, and Violets for indoors

Q. What are some of the personal benefits of working outdoors as you plant, weed, and maintain your flower gardens?

A. Fresh air is invigorating. It forces you to be out of the house and is personally rewarding as you see the results coming to fruition.

Q. How much time do you devote to working outdoors?

A. I generally spend anywhere from one half to a full hour. It keeps the weeds in check.

Q. What about bird feeders?

A. Humming birds are a joy and they are drawn to plants like Fuchsia. We especially enjoy the bright yellow finches as they feed. We place feeders in front of windows. Our kitchen table sits next to a window and we have the enjoyment of watching all of the activity while we are eating.

Q. What areas do you utilize for plants?

A. I like to place them where I can see them through windows. Also, I plant along walkways. People can share in the colors as they walk by. It is satisfying for us and others as well.

Q. Tell me the benefits of enjoying the outdoors for you and Dad?

A. Breathing fresh air, there is nothing like it. Taking walks during nice weather and getting out of the house is wonderful.

Q. After another long winter, what do you look forward to as spring begins?

A. I look forward to hearing birds, their chirping is welcomed. Watching birds begin nesting along with tulips in bloom mean new life.

#### *A few closing ideas for caregivers*

- Give some thought to joining a local gardening club.
- Take the time for short trips to floral gardens and parks
- Spend time outdoors during the warm months (there are no walls).
- Create cut flower bouquets for yourself and share with others.
- Enjoy the fruits of your labor and draw strength from the natural beauty you experience. You have one of the most important callings in life, that of a caregiver.

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