

Enjoy your garden's restorative qualities

By Susan Stafford
Correspondent

As we age, the garden we planted 10, 20 or 30 years ago may no longer be a source of joy and pride. Rather it may seem overwhelming and burdensome.

The large lawn that has always been green and carefully tended, and requires aerating, thatching, fertilizing, watering, mowing and edging, can begin to take on the proportions of a football field in our mind's eye.

Those beautiful perennial beds that require continual weeding, edging, pruning, deadheading, amending and transplanting can make it seem as if you're battling the many-headed hydra as you struggle to keep up with three seasons of chores. You are now glad to see the dormancy of winter arrive.

That bountiful backyard vegetable garden with rows of corn, hills of potatoes and squash, and towers of pole beans and peas, surrounded by lettuce, radishes, kale, onions, and other delectables, is no longer physically possible but you still want to be

able to pop a fresh cherry tomato in your mouth on a warm summer's day.

With some modifications, an overwhelming yard can again be a place in which you enjoy spending time. And it isn't necessary to push yourself beyond your limits physically to maintain it.

Take a look at your yard with new eyes. What changes can you make to reduce the amount of physical labor and stamina that are required to keep your yard an attractive asset that provides enjoyable exercise and a sense of place?

A good place to start would be to consider removing all or part of your lawn and replacing it with low ground-cover, native grasses, or native plants and river rock. Not only will you cut down or eliminate time spent mowing and edging; there will be a reduction in the annual expense for fertilizers and water.

Give away to younger gardening friends your plants that require a great deal of time and effort to maintain. Replace them with plant material that doesn't require a lot of tending, like staking, pruning, watering and

transplanting. Trouble-free plants, that the deer won't eat, and that grow well in Central Oregon include daffodils, iris, all types of grasses, barberry, lydia broom (the bright yellow bush in bloom right now), elderberry, and lavender, to name a few.

The types of flower and vegetable beds you have can also be modified to be easier on your body, eliminating excessive stooping, bending and kneeling. If you have a bad back or have trouble bending over, take advantage of vertical growing space using arbors, trellises, and waist-high raised beds. Raised beds of various heights are not only easier to work on; they bring plants up closer for increased visibility for persons with low vision.

Design the raised beds so the center can be reached comfortably without stretching too far. The top edge of a high raised bed should be narrow to maximize the area of soil surface within reach of the gardener. Also consider its possible use as a support to lean against or hold onto. The lower raised bed, with a slightly wider

top, provides possible seating while working.

When planning a new garden or making modifications, consider accessibility, safety and maneuverability. How far can you comfortably reach? Do you need smooth surfaces and level pathways? What height beds will work? Will tools be nearby?

Vertical gardens can be supporting structures, fences, walls, trellises, container trellises, arbors, netting, or strings. For watering, the vertical garden is soaked from the top and doesn't dry out as fast because there's less exposure to the air. With the use of adaptive tools and appropriate planting spaces, gardening from a seated position is very doable as well.

If you don't have yard space or you want to limit your gardening to your deck or patio, there is no limit to the variety of containers that provide the opportunity to garden in small spaces. They can be placed where you'll have good access to them. For growing tomatoes and other spreading vegetables like squash, and tall or climbing plants, use wire cages, stakes

or trellises as needed for them to grow on. After planting, cover the top of the soil with mulch for better moisture retention. Use of moisture-retentive potting mix also cuts down on time spent watering.

Some containers have hidden reservoirs in the bottom to keep plants watered for several days, easing watering chores. For large or heavy containers, place them in rolling saucers, which makes moving them easy. Many containers are also now available in lightweight materials.

Raise pots up higher by placing them on plant stands or place them on top of another inverted pot to reduce bending over. For hanging baskets make a pulley system to raise and lower them, making it possible to water and tend them even if seated or in a wheelchair. Lowering the basket eliminates the need to reach overhead.

Once your garden no longer feels overwhelming, you can again enjoy its restorative effects. It becomes a place to easily get some pleasant exercise and fresh air, a place to relax and reflect, enriching your quality of life.



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NATE GOODWIN
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