



Tips for Easier Gardening

This leaflet offers tips for easier gardening from Thrive. It provides information on improving access to the garden and offers low-maintenance solutions. It gives advice on tools and techniques and includes suggestions of easy-care plants.

The benefits of an appropriately designed garden

A well-designed garden will:

- be easier to look after
- give you a new hobby
- allow easier access for gardeners and visitors
- give you pleasure and a sense of achievement
- encourage you to take regular exercise
- provide an opportunity to improve wellbeing or even self-confidence – a beautiful garden is something to be proud of
- allow you to grow your own food.





Considerations for your garden

You may want to make sure that your garden:

- requires little maintenance
- costs little to maintain
- looks attractive
- can be easily accessed from your house
- includes places to sit, relax and entertain
- feels safe and familiar
- includes interesting, useful or familiar plants (to serve as memory triggers)
- enables you to enjoy other hobbies and activities
- provides you with accessible storage and work areas.



Improving access in the garden

- Choose non-slip and low-glare paving materials that are laid level. Add chicken wire to steps to improve grip
- if possible replace steps with a non-slip ramp
- make sure that plants do not obstruct footpaths
- reduce the width of borders – this allows for easier access without having to stand on the border
- widen paths to 1 metre as a minimum
- remove moss, algae and debris from paths to avoid a slip hazard
- consider using portable plastic paths on grass for wheelchairs or wheelbarrows
- raising soil level may help with access. There is no standard dimension for a raised bed – simply raising the ground level up by 12cm may make cultivation easier
- use old carpet (face down) to create level routes across a vegetable garden – carpet will also suppress weeds
- have a light installed in the garden or above the doorway to the garden to improve visibility on dull days or on winter evenings
- consider building freestanding handrails or attach them to existing garden structures
- ensure easy access between your house and any regularly used areas of the garden, such as a tool shed or glasshouse.





Low-maintenance solutions

- Remove or reduce areas of the garden which require frequent maintenance, such as lawns
- use 'no dig' methods if you have a vegetable garden
- mulches of bark, plastic or gravel can suppress weed growth and conserve moisture in the soil. If possible lay bark or plastic over weed suppressing membrane
- choose plants carefully to avoid longer-term maintenance problems
- line containers and hanging baskets with plastic to help prevent drying out
- to clear an area of annual weeds, cover it with hessian-backed carpet or black plastic, weighted down at the sides. After a growing season the area should be clear of weeds and ready for planting
- divide up flower and vegetable patches – this will enable you to maintain an area in one gardening session and give you a more rapid sense of achievement
- replace hedges with fences
- design the garden around hard surfaces which require little maintenance
- choose climbing plants that are self-clinging – no support is required and they do not have to be regularly tied up (eg clematis).



Plant selection suggestions

There are many plants that can be grown easily and with little maintenance. The best way to find out what would be good for you and your garden would be to ask an expert at your local garden centre. They will have a good idea what the soil will be like in the area where you live.

You can also visit the free RHS plant finder online at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/search-form>

This lists more than 250,000 plants and you can ask specific questions about low maintenance, soil, sunlight, type of garden, amount of pruning.



- Choose plants that will grow well in the position you have in mind. Research before buying can avoid costly mistakes
- avoid very fast-growing plants which will require frequent pruning
- choose 'user friendly' plants, for example those without thorns
- use ground-cover plants to cut down on weeding
- select plants from which you can take cuttings easily – you can use these to fill gaps in the garden
- choose plants that are less susceptible to pests and disease
- grow vegetables on a small scale for less effort, for example in containers.



Tools and techniques for easier gardening

- Try out tools before buying them – consider their weight, your grip and your balance
- find the lightest tools with the widest handles as they are easier to grip – to increase the handle width, pad it out
- when choosing shears or secateurs, try a few out before buying – some springs and actions may be looser than others
- check what materials the tools are made of – stainless steel tools offer less resistance in the soil and are easier to clean. Plastic, carbon-fibre and aluminium tools are the lightest
- look for tools with interchangeable heads – you can use them with a handle that suits you, and it is sometimes possible to use them as hand tools too
- consider purchasing power tools – great for larger jobs like hedge-cutting and strimming sizeable areas. Why not share the cost with a friend, relative or neighbour
- keep your back as straight as possible because good posture makes gardening easier
- vary your gardening tasks to vary body movements
- wheelbarrows with 'pram' type handles are generally easier to use and can be steered with just one hand
- borrow tools from friends, relatives or neighbours before buying them to ensure you make the best purchase.



Can Thrive help you or somebody you know?

Thrive is the leading charity in the UK that uses gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people who are living with disabilities or ill health, or are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

This process is known as social and therapeutic horticulture (STH). It uses plants and gardens to improve physical and mental health, as well as strengthen communication skills. Using gardening as a safe and secure way to develop someone's ability to mix socially and make friends, and to learn practical skills to help them be more independent, is now a proven therapy.

Contact Thrive to find out more or for specific help and advice:



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For a more in-depth look at ways of making gardening easier for when you have a specific disability, visit **www.carryongardening.org.uk**



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