

## Oh My Blooming Back

Now is the time to consider getting ready for the gardening and with the warming of the weather we are tempted into the garden to do our first piece of manual work for ages. Sadly year after year our receptionists are swamped with people in pain, requiring immediate help. If, like many people, gardening is your one main leisure activity, it is not just the soil you need to prepare. We believe it pays to be prepared especially if you are to enjoy a pain free summer.



The main cause of back pain when gardening is the prolonged stretching of the ligaments and joints in the spine caused by stooping for long periods, or kneeling bent over whilst planting. These positions place considerable stress on the ligaments and joints in the lower lumbar spine and cause them to become inflamed and tender. This in turn provokes muscle spasm either side of the joints and ligaments, and gives rise to deeper, duller, achy type of pain that occurs over the following few days. Digging may well also give rise to back ache if muscles are not prepared beforehand. So it pays to exercise the joints and muscles prior to descending on your garden in the spring.

- Kneel on one leg rather than bending down repeatedly from the hips.
- Try and keep your back hollow when digging, with the legs well spaced apart.
- Try and vary the tasks of the day into short bursts of different activities rather than slogging all day at one thing.
- When mowing lawns with a hover mower try to resist the temptation to swing the mower from side to side in an arc. Instead mow forwards and backwards as you would with a conventional cylinder mower.
- If you suffer from knee problems or osteoarthritis and tend to stoop rather than kneeling, then use a cushion to kneel on or when bending try keeping the back as hollow as possible.
- If you ache the next day, rest, and seek the advice of your chiropractor who will advise you whether you should apply heat, or icepacks to the area, or if you require further treatment.

You should exercise to keep fit so that you can enjoy your gardening, rather than using your gardening as an exercise to keep fit. Here are the chiropractor's top ten gardening tips:



- ◆ Gently stretch your muscles and ligaments for a few minutes before and after gardening, but don't bend down to touch your toes - this can cause damage.
- ◆ Wear light, but warm clothes and make sure your lower back is covered at all times. Don't let sweaters ride up.
- ◆ Kneel on one leg rather than bending repeatedly from the hip.
- ◆ Use long handled tools to prune tall plants.
- ◆ Use only a small spade/fork for digging and keep your back gently hollowed.
- ◆ Do not always work to one side only; vary your position.
- ◆ Don't do the same work for long periods, vary your task.
- ◆ Keep your back straight when carrying, better still use a wheelbarrow.
- ◆ When finished, have a warm bath or shower.
- ◆ Do not sit in your favourite armchair afterwards, stand up regularly and walk around.