

This season, plant your perennials without paying the price

To novice gardeners, the pastime seems like a bed of roses, but green thumbs know there's plenty of hard work required to make your garden grow. Lifting and hauling, digging, aerating and planting are all good exercise, but they can also lead to injury if the gardener isn't properly prepared.

Improper gardening techniques can cause:

- Repetitive strain injuries of the wrist and elbow
- Sprain/strain injuries to muscles throughout the body, but especially in the lower back
- Wear and tear on joints and muscles.

Here are a few stretching tips that will help you make your garden the envy of the neighbourhood while helping you to be pain free.

Warm-up with a short walk, then gently repeat each of the following stretches five times. Hold all stretches for 15 to 20 seconds. Stop if it is painful.

Thigh Stretch: With one hand on the wall or a tree, bend your left knee then reach back and hold your ankle with your right hand. Pull your heel toward your buttocks and hold for 30 seconds. Relax and repeat with the other leg. To stretch the back thigh muscles (hamstrings), with one hand on the wall or a tree put one foot on a chair, stump, or step. Slowly bend forward from the waist until you feel the pull at the back of your thigh. Hold for 30 seconds. Relax and repeat with the other leg.

Back Stretch: Sit on a chair and slowly bend your body forward from your hips, putting your head down and resting your hands on the floor. Hold, then relax.

Shoulder Rolls: With your arms hanging loosely at your sides, slowly rotate your shoulders in a circular motion forward, then backward.

Wrist Extension: Hold one arm straight out as if you were giving a 'stop' signal, use your opposite hand to hold this position. Hold. Repeat with the other hand.

Wrist Flexion: Hold one arm out in front, palm down. Bend your fingers until they point toward the ground. Use your opposite hand to hold this position.

