

This Old House

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LOVELY,
LOW-COST
GARDEN
IDEAS
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Colorful, carefree new plants for pots

 PARTY HOT SPOT!
BACKYARD COCKTAIL CABINET

Clever ways to bust clutter at the door

MAY 2013
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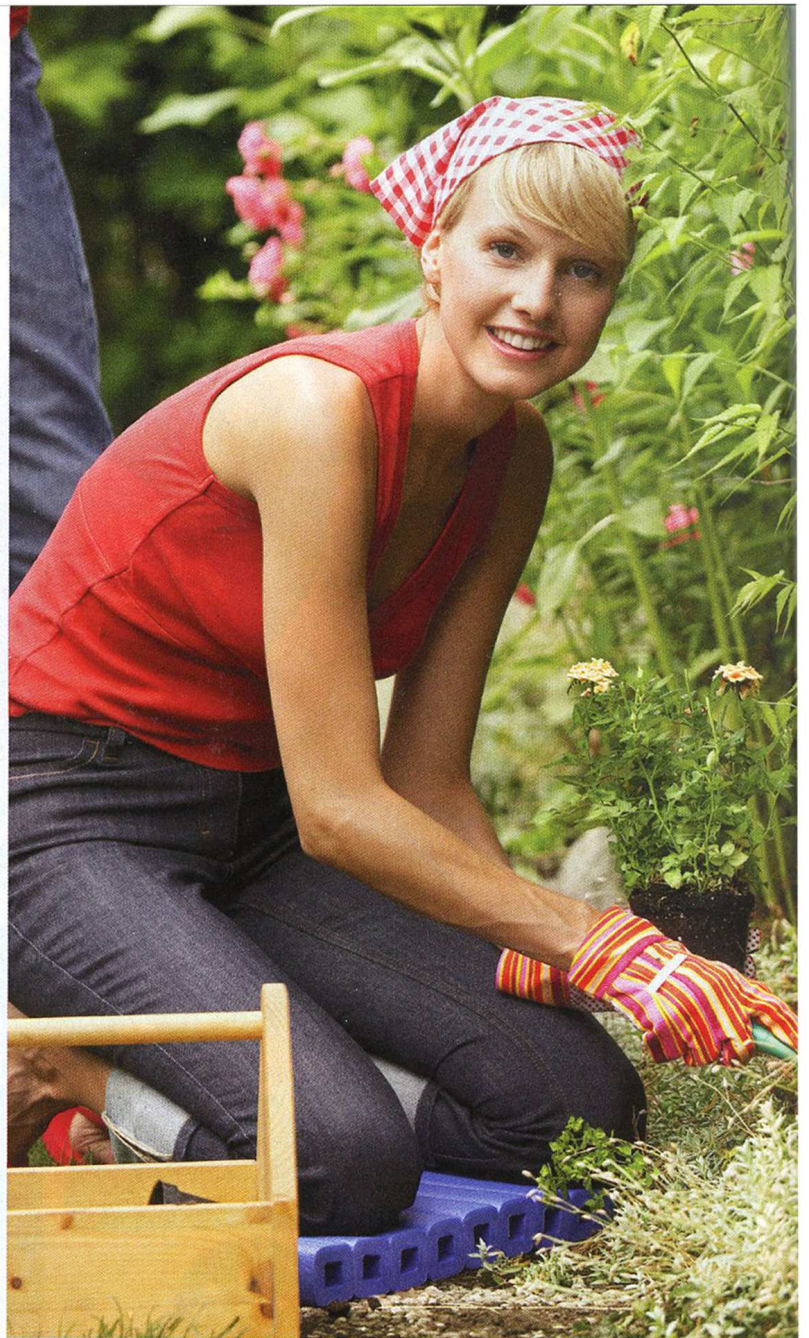
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There's nothing like heading into your yard on a warm spring day and getting your hands dirty—in a good way. "Gardening can be great for reducing stress," says Alexis Chiang Colvin, MD, an orthopedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, in New York City. "You're out in the fresh air and sunshine, getting your daily dose of moderate exercise." But you want to do it safely, without bug bites and back pain. Follow these ground rules to enjoy the growing season in good health.



1. EASY-GRIP TOOLS

How handy: a cultivator, a fork, and a trowel, each with an on-top-of-the-handle grip to keep your wrist in a neutral position. Fist Grip tools, \$16 each; lifewiththease.com



2. COMPRESSION GLOVES

Protect your hands and enjoy these extras: silicone finger pads to help you grab hold and a snug fit with mild compression to help reduce pain. Bionic ReliefGrip gardening gloves, \$35; bionicgloves.com

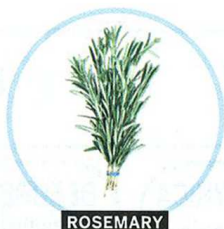
ADD HERBS

Get more from your patch of green by planting these easy-to-grow, healthful herbs in your garden, suggests Brian Hetrich, ND, of the Hippocrates Health Institute, in West Palm Beach, Florida.



BASIL

This highly fragrant plant packs vitamins A and K, and its essential oil has been shown to have antibacterial properties. **GROW TIP:** An annual, basil can thrive inside or out (plant after the danger of frost passes). It prefers sun and moist, well-drained, slightly acidic soil combined with compost. Space plants about 12 inches apart, water at least every other day, and harvest select leaves when a plant is about 10 inches tall.



ROSEMARY

Rosemary leaves have compounds that may help boost the immune system and improve digestion and memory. **GROW TIP:** Plant this tender perennial in the ground in warm climates or in pots you can move indoors during winter. It prefers slightly alkaline soil and lots of sun. Space plants at least 24 inches apart, and keep soil moist until the herb is established, which may take a year.



MINT

Great in tea and even in savory dishes, mint can aid digestion, and it also provides vitamins A and C. **GROW TIP:** Plant seedlings about 15 inches apart in moist, well-drained soil in a sunny spot. (Mint spreads rampantly, so consider using pots.) Keep well hydrated, watering at least every other day. Removing the leaves from the top of a plant will encourage new growth down the stem.



Infection might not seem like a big gardening hazard, but the soil in your yard might be, well, soiled with lead and other toxic chemicals from old paint and plumbing, contaminants from pesticides, and parasites from pet or wild-animal droppings (hello, giardia and toxoplasmosis), not to mention tetanus and E. coli. The best defense is to invest in a quality pair of gardening gloves—either thin and fitted for tasks that require dexterity or leather ones in a gauntlet style for when you're clearing brambles or thorny bushes. If you do get a cut, nick, or scrape, wash it thoroughly with soap and warm water to keep the risky stuff from getting into your bloodstream and potentially causing an infection.

PAIN-FREE POSITIONING

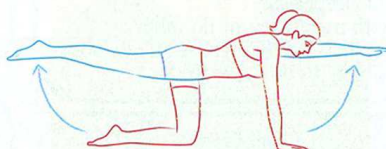
Using your body properly will help you avoid aches later. While standing, keep your back straight with your knees bent slightly, neck and shoulders relaxed.

GET LOW Don't bend from the waist. Instead, kneel on a cushion, or sit on a stool or an overturned bucket, as long as it's low enough for you to maintain a straight back. Make access even easier by planting a raised bed (about 10 inches high) and using tools with longer handles.

LIFT SMART For heavy items, squat down and engage the muscles in

your thighs and butt when you stand up, keeping your knees bent and your back straight. Hug heavy pots or bags of soil close to your body as you straighten.

SWITCH IT UP To avoid repetitive-stress injury, rotate tasks that involve doing the same motions again and again (raking, digging) every 15 to 20 minutes and briefly rest or stretch in between.



Ache-stopping stretch

Soothe a sore back with this helpful move from Dr. Colvin: Get down on all fours; reach your right leg behind you and your left arm in front. (The higher you lift your leg and arm, the more you stretch out your back; it's the opposite of the crunched position we tend to end up in while weeding.) Hold for 5 seconds, then switch sides and repeat.



3. COMFORT SHOVEL

Power through spring planting: This blade is designed for easy digging, and the rubbery handle is circular for better leverage. Radius Pro shovel, \$45; radiusgarden.com



4. SUPER PRUNERS

What's so special about these tools? Their designs ease the burden on your aching hands by requiring less effort to cut dead or live branches. From left: Fiskars Ratchet Anvil pruner, \$12, and PowerGear Bypass pruner, \$30; fiskars.com



5. LIGHTWEIGHT TRIMMER

Avoid the physical stress of shaping tall hedges by using a lightweight cordless tool. Black & Decker hedge trimmer with 20-volt lithium-ion battery, \$100; blackanddecker.com



Leave these alone!

Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac can be tricky to spot. Generally, poison ivy climbs or creeps. Its leaves come in threes and can be shiny green or reddish, with smooth or jagged edges. Poison oak also grows in clusters of three, with leaves that resemble oak tree leaves. Poison sumac is a rangy shrub, with smooth-edged green leaves and red stems. If you brush up against these plants, immediately wash with cool water to remove the oils from your skin, and wash clothes in hot water.



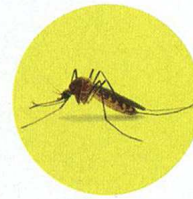
AVOID TICKS

To steer clear of Lyme disease, wear long pants tucked into socks. Check yourself and pets when coming inside. Find a critter? Use tweezers to pull it up and out; wash with soap and water. See an MD if you get a rash or fever within a few weeks, advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



BEAT A BEE STING

Bees want nectar-filled flowers, so don't resemble one: Avoid bright floral clothes and scented lotions. And always wear shoes—many stings happen when bees are stepped on. If you get stung, wash with soap and water; remove the stinger by wiping with gauze, says the CDC.



MANAGE MOSQUITOES

They mostly just cause itchy welts, but mosquitoes can carry disease. To keep them out of your yard, remove breeding grounds, like buckets, empty pots, and anywhere else water collects. They tend to bite at dawn and dusk, so if you're out, wear a repellent with DEET.

PROTECT YOUR BODY

Are you a weekend warrior in your garden? Unless you're super fit, start slow and build up gradually, says Dr. Colvin: "It's easy to throw your back out." These moves will help prevent muscle and joint pain.

GET LOOSE Walk around for a few minutes, then warm up the big muscles in your upper back, arms, and knees with these stretches (repeat series two or three times):
1. Lace fingers together and extend arms in front of you. Raise arms up and reach for ceiling. Hold for 3 seconds, feeling stretch across

upper back; release. Lace fingers behind you and press back, pushing chest forward. Hold for 3 seconds.

2. While standing, bend right knee and bring right heel up toward butt; use right hand to hold heel there for 5 seconds. Switch legs and repeat on other side.

Stay sun-safe

Whenever you're outdoors, the sun can damage your skin, so slather on a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 30. Don a wide-brim hat, as well as long sleeves and pants, all in lightweight materials—you don't want to get overheated! Head indoors midday, when the sun is strongest. And don't neglect hydration: Sip from a water bottle every 15 minutes.



6. KNEE-SAVER

Kneel on the pad when working low to the ground, or flip the frame and sit on the seat while pruning. Gardener's Supply Company garden kneeler, \$35; gardeners.com



7. STAND-UP WEEDER

Long handles mean less back strain! Simply step on the pedal and pull back, and the four serrated claws will grab and yank out the unwanted plant, taproot and all. Fiskars UpRoot weed and root remover, \$38; fiskars.com



8. COMPACT HOSE

Great for watering pots on a deck or patio, this plastic hose practically coils itself up after use and weighs about half as much as a traditional model. Orbit 25-foot coil hose, \$25; amazon.com



STILL-LIFE PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISA SHIN