

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

F A C T S H E E T



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mgghelp@masshort.org.

Ergonomic Garden Tools

Ergonomics is the science of work, specifically the study of how workers adjust to their working environment. The goal of ergonomics is to determine how activities (i.e. work), can be done more efficiently with the greatest comfort.

Ergonomic garden tools have been developed in recent years in response to the demand by gardeners for tools that cause less stress on the joints. People are enjoying gardening into older years and many gardeners are “weekend warriors”, only able to garden in their free time.

The benefits of ergonomic garden tools are many:

1. Ergonomic garden tools cause less strain on joints, muscles and tendons.
2. They decrease the risk of repetitive stress injury.
3. They lessen the occurrence of acute injury to joints, tendons and muscles.
4. They decrease the amount of activity (effort and time) to complete a job.
5. They increase the fun and enjoyment of performing garden activities.

An ergonomic tool is one that has been designed with the user in mind. The grips of ergonomic garden tools are larger, softer, and non-slip allowing them to be held with more comfort, requiring less effort. The handles of many ergonomic garden tools are angled to improve ease of use and a more natural body alignment. Many have adjustable handles that can be altered to accommodate different users and uses. The overall weight of ergonomic garden tools are less than standard garden tools decreasing the work of muscles and conserving energy.

Many different companies now offer ergonomic gardening tools for sale. Not all ergonomic tools are alike just as all hands are different sizes, so it is to your benefit to actually handle them and determine if they are comfortable to you. It is important to have a tool that fits your hand.

Make a circle, touching your index finger tip to the tip of your thumb; this is the approximate size of an ergonomic grip for your hand. The tool should be comfortable to hold and should fit your needs.

It is important to remember that you need to pick the right tool for the job. A hand shovel, no matter how ergonomic, will not decrease the work or strain of dividing a large perennial plant. Bear in mind, too, that to benefit the most from the use of ergonomic tools they must be used with good body mechanics in mind.

Ergonomic garden tools must be used properly. Move into a garden bed, do not over reach which will put strain on shoulder joints, elbows and wrists. Keep your back straight and use your legs when lifting objects. Maintain a neutral grip on your garden tool, avoid using a tool with your wrist too flexed or extended. Avoid using any tool from an awkward position. Get a second set of hands to help when needed, even if sometimes this means calling in a professional landscape worker.

Using ergonomic garden tools will keep gardening fun, decreasing the work and increasing the time you have to smell the roses.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>