

## Safe Gardening

### Tips for how to reduce the risk of injury

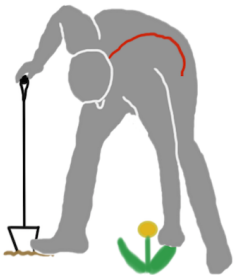
When spring time hits and the weather improves many people head out into the garden and begin to get things in shape ready for the summer – this usually results in injury clinics seeing an increase in low back pain patients as well as many other joint complaints. However, with a few simple changes and considerations the chance of these injuries can be greatly reduced.



Be aware of how you're holding your posture when performing these tasks – try to avoid excessive slumping of the low back and where possible maintain an upright position.



Avoid performing a single task for a lengthy period of time – keep things varied with frequent breaks.



When weeding avoid stooping over whilst keeping the legs straight, instead try to bend the knees and squat down to the level you are weeding at. If your knees are uncomfortable with this action then you may prefer to perform a lunging action or use a kneeling cushion and kneel down. With any position you choose to use try to maintain an upright neutral posture to avoid low back slumping.



When digging avoid stooping forwards at the hips and instead partly flex the knees, using a wide and shallow squat stance. Keep the chest proud as you work to help maintain an upright posture. Many low back injuries occur when a slumping action is combined with a twist or turn as well.



When potting try to set the pots at a level you can work at with an upright posture; for example, at a level where you can sit and work. This reduces the strain involved and makes it easier to maintain an upright position. Also, be aware of your lifting technique to reduce strain and the chance of injury (see our safe lifting sheet in our lifestyle advice library).



Finally, repetitive strain should be considered when performing these tasks. Strain can accumulate to injury levels when a mild strenuous activity is performed for a lengthy period of time. If you have spent most of the winter being inactive don't expect to garden for numerous hours in one go and not suffer pain as a result – vary your tasks to reduce strain and take regular breaks. Allow your body to adapt to the new physical demand you're putting upon it.

