

# Checklist for You and Your Garden

## **YOURSELF**

- Give yourself time off for good behavior! Take frequent breaks.
- Drink lots of water.
- Use sunscreen and wear protective clothing.
- Wear gloves.
- Ask for help with heavy and awkward things.
- Do a little stretching before starting to work.
- Keep your cell phone handy in case you need to summon help.
- Accept imperfection.

## **SOFTSCAPE**

- Use lots of ground covers.
- Use plants as mulch.
- Replace plants requiring extra care such as staking with ones that don't (think delphiniums and dahlias.)
- Primarily stick to spring, summer and fall blooming bulbs as they virtually take care of themselves once planted.
- Plant both deciduous and evergreen shrubs and trees that require less maintenance.
- Shrink your garden by planting shrubs on the outside edges of the garden to shrink the space that you need to reach and take care of.
- Limit the number of perennials in the garden. Deadheading, cutting back, pruning, dividing and moving them to keep them healthy becomes harder work than necessary when simplifying your gardening chores.
- Select and stick to a color scheme so that you can make easier decisions about which perennials to keep and which to give away.
- Choose bulletproof plants.

- Plant in drifts.
- Stay away from nursery sales! It is too easy to succumb to the newest, brightest plant available. It is too easy to forget your color scheme.
- Go to the nursery with a list and stick to it.
- Try to go a whole year without purchasing a plant.
- If your space is small, consider removing all the lawn. Nothing is worse than trying to keep up with mowing when you aren't moving as easily as you used to. Replace it with ground cover or garden beds with pathways. They can actually be much less maintenance and give you more pleasure.
- Pick your battles. If you have a favorite plant that takes a bit of effort to keep it in line, then have it, but simplify the rest of the garden around it. The bottom line is that you want your garden to look attractive, to be accessible and to grow without making too many demands on your time and physical ability.

## TOOLS

- Analyze your tools. Are they helping or hindering?
- Don't use something that is hurting your hands/arms/shoulders/neck.
- Are you using something that needs to be used in an awkward manner?
- Are you lugging heavy objects?
- Are you using the world's heaviest hose?
- Do you have a good nozzle that will reach areas needing water while allowing you to stand on a solid surface?
- Look for tools approved by the Arthritis Foundation.
- There are also devices for helping with getting up and down from the ground such as a rolling bench that converts into a kneeling pad, and buckets with seats.
- Consider purchasing battery-operated tools.
- Adapt items you already own:
  - Use BBQ tools.
  - Use a 6" prying bar.
  - Switch to lighter weight and smaller buckets.

- Use pipe insulation to enlarge tool handles.
- Use buckets or coolers on wheels.
- Attach longer handles to short-handled tools.
- Stash tools where you use them. Use 5 gallon buckets, old mailboxes, hooks, and totes.

## **HARDSCAPE**

- Use more hardscape: patios, decks, level surfaces.
- Have more places for benches and chairs with arms.
- Bring the garden to you (raised beds, containers, hanging baskets, vertical garden walls).
- Place plants that need more care to keep blooming closer to the house.
- Take into consideration the view from indoors.
- Think about adaptations while you are still able to move freely about your garden so that you make hardscape and softscape decisions that will work over the years.
- Consider placing permanent edging around your garden so that you cannot be tempted to expand the flower bed.
- Locate a source of water conveniently near the most frequently used garden beds.

## **ADAPTIVE DESIGN**

- Consider consulting a garden designer or LA. They are valuable in assessing grade, accessibility, correct materials, watering systems, etc.
- Pathways need to be at least 3' wide, preferably wider, with turn-around areas built into the garden layout and be as level as possible with grades 5% or less.
- The surface of the pathway needs to be solid and stay solid in all types of weather.
- Create a patio or deck next to the house with vertical gardens and containers.
- Make sure that your garden furniture is sturdy but moveable, that is has arms

and a supportive back. If you use cushions, make sure they are attached to the furniture (no loose pillows).

- Creating a lush planting area near the windows of a house or apartment can bring the garden to someone who has difficulty getting outside.
- **Build raised beds:** for gardeners working from a wheelchair, the soil level needs to be about 24-30" from the ground with about 12" of soil depth so that the person is not working at shoulder level or above. If the plantings are going to be harvested, then the lower level of 24" is ideal so that the gardener can reach the taller plants when harvesting.
- Standard raised bed width is 4', but for the seated gardener, 3' is a better width.
- Gardeners using a walker will either require a chair or bench near the bed and the same conditions apply, as they will be gardening from the same height as a gardener in a wheelchair.
- Raised beds with wide ledges around the edge provide convenient seating.
- If they are using a 4WW, they can sit on the built in seat. But, in those cases, the seat is higher than the standard 15-18" so the height of the bed will have to be adjusted.
- Gardeners using a standard walker can garden from a standing position. In that case, the raised bed will need to be at least 36" high.
- The raised beds should also be accessible from all sides so that the gardener can move around the bed. If that is not possible, then think about narrowing the width of the bed.
- Provide trellises and other supports for vines and tall plants just as you would in a ground level garden. Check how high the wheelchair-bound gardener can reach and don't build a trellis higher than that level.
- Think about location. Keep the garden access near doors that do not present a barrier to use such as too heavy to open, high threshold, steps in & out of the house and too far from where the gardening activity will take place.