



## Buzz, Body & Bites

A newsletter for actively aging adults  
Virginia Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Sciences  
April 2023

### The Healing Effects of Gardening

For centuries people have understood that spending time in nature is healing. Ancient Egyptians “prescribed” walks in gardens. Soldiers in World War I tended to grow flowers near the front. But it wasn’t until the last century that researchers began to validate what gardeners have always known: gardening or spending time in nature confers physical, psychological, cognitive, and social benefits. Gardening can help reduce stress, improve cognition, decrease anxiety and depression, improve hand-eye coordination, increase flexibility, and strengthen bones. Patients recovering from surgery, whose room included a window overlooking trees healed faster and required less medication than patients whose window faced a wall.

Increasingly, programs that utilize horticulture to help people heal, improve lost function, or learn new skills, can be found in hospitals, correctional facilities, shelters, nursing homes, and schools. Cooperative Extension trains Master Gardener volunteers who are sharing their passion for “playing in the dirt”, with adults with disabilities, people with dementia, veterans with PTSD, violence, children with special needs – and more. VCE Master Gardeners in Alexandria-Arlington, are preparing to launch a pilot program for people with mild to moderate dementia who reside in the memory care unit. The program aims to provide fun and rewarding gardening-related activities that will stimulate memories, foster social interaction, and positively impact the mood of the participants.

New to gardening? Extension Master Gardeners throughout Virginia can teach you the basics. Experienced gardeners can also participate in more advanced educational sessions. Of course, before embarking on any new physical activity, check with your doctor, avoid gardening in the heat of the day, protect your skin, and pace yourself. You don’t have to weed your entire garden bed in one day.

Gardening can be done by people of all ages. If you’re concerned that your grandchildren spend too much time in front of a screen, get them to help you in the garden. They’ll experience all the health benefits you will, and will carry a lifelong memory of the taste of the first tomato they ate fresh off the vine.

There’s a saying among gardeners, “Gardening is cheaper than therapy and you get tomatoes”. So, put on your gardening hat and gloves and reap the many benefits Nature offers.

Tricia Rodgers, MA, MSW, Alexandria-Arlington Master Gardener

### Tips for an Environmentally Friendly Diet

Interested in gardening, environment sustainability, and helping others? Become an Extension Master Gardener and bring evidence-based resources of Virginia’s land-grant universities to your community! Master Gardener Volunteers provide information on a variety of topics, including gardening vegetables,

pest identification, landscape management, and tree care. You will receive a minimum of 50 hours of training and complete 50 hours of volunteer service in return.

Master Gardeners typically offer Help Desks, workshops, classes, or plant clinics for all ages. Pick up a soil sample test kit to test your soil before you plant your garden. For questions about gardening, contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office.

For more information, visit the VCE Master Gardener website or Kathleen Reed (reedka@vt.edu) or Devon Johnson (dvj@vt.edu)

## **Achieving the Physical Activity Guidelines Step 3: Talk Test and Rate of Perceived Exertion**

The guidelines recommend you are physically active for 150 minutes weekly at moderate intensity or 75 minutes at vigorous intensity. There are two ways to determine physical activity intensity:

Use a scale from 0 to 10 to assess intensity of the activity with “0” as sitting, and “10” as the highest possible effort. Moderate intensity would be between 5-6 and vigorous intensity is 7-8.

Use the “Talk Test”. While doing moderate physical activity you will be able to talk, but you cannot sing. When doing vigorous intensity exercise, you cannot say more than a few words without pausing to take a breath.

Examples of activities to achieve moderate or vigorous intensity can be found at [health.gov](http://health.gov).

## **Parmesan Asparagus**

Asparagus is ready to harvest mid to late spring. Take advantage of the season and try this cheesy recipe with asparagus fresh from the garden.

### **Ingredients (Makes 8 servings):**

- 2 pounds asparagus rinsed and trimmed
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup whole wheat panko breadcrumbs
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon paprika

### **Instructions:**

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees
2. Place asparagus on a large baking sheet and drizzle olive oil evenly over asparagus
3. Roast asparagus for 15-20 minutes until tender
4. While asparagus is roasting, combine panko breadcrumbs, paprika, onion powder, and parmesan cheese
5. Remove asparagus from oven and lightly sprinkle with seasoned breadcrumb mixture
6. Return asparagus to the oven for 5 minutes, or until breadcrumbs begin to lightly brown.
7. Remove from the oven and Serve.

## Resources

Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners:

[ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/master-gardener.html](http://ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/master-gardener.html)

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion:

[health.gov](http://health.gov)

Rate of Perceived Exertion:

[mtsu.edu/camprec/fitness/forms/RateofPerceivedExertion.pdf](http://mtsu.edu/camprec/fitness/forms/RateofPerceivedExertion.pdf)

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2023

HNFE-1087ANP