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K-STATE
Research and Extension

Newsletter #5 • 2012

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Warm up for Gardening

Gardening and yard care are physical activities you can enjoy for a lifetime. Just like any form of exercise, it pays to warm up for gardening.

Warm-up activities can reduce risk of injuries, relieve tension, improve balance, increase blood flow, and aid in reducing low-back pain and soreness. Start by walking 4 to 5 minutes. A few laps around the house should do.

Joints get lubrication through movement, so add basic stretches to your warm-up. Stretch your neck by slowly moving it from side to side. Bend forward at your waist and let your arms hang toward your toes, then stand and roll your shoulders back and around. It is always good to stretch hamstrings (use a chair for balance), and include a few squats to warm up legs and knees.

As you work, be mindful of how your body is positioned. Scott Johnson, a physical therapist and certified strength and conditioning specialist at Maximum Performance Studio in Manhattan, Kan., recommends four rules for less painful gardening and lifting. The first is to **stay in a neutral position** as often as possible.

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Warm up for Gardening

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"Your work zone is your waist to your eye level. Think about bringing the garden up to you, or you going down to where your garden is," Johnson says, "and try to avoid twisting movements, which cause a lot of back stress."

The second rule is to **lift with your legs**. Your leg muscles are much stronger than muscles in your back. With your feet about shoulder width apart, lower your body toward the ground by bending your knees. Keep eyes focused upward to stay in a neutral position as much as possible, as Johnson demonstrates in the photo on page 1.

Keep things in close to you. Holding at arm's length adds 7 to 10 times more stress to your back. Keep the object you are lifting balanced and close to you.

Rule number four is to **limit twisting**. Tighten abdominal muscles as you are lifting. If you need to turn while lifting, pivot your feet instead of twisting your back.

A good cool-down to gardening is just as important as a warm-up. While it may be tempting to just sit down after hours of gardening, slow walking is better. Follow with more stretches — a little slower and longer this time.

Common Sense Guide to Gardening

- **Avoid sunburn.** Use sunscreen, wear sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat.
- **Protect your feet.** Flip flops and old sneakers are not the best garden shoes. Go for sturdy shoes or boots.
- **Learn to recognize poison ivy.** Remember: "leaves of three, let it be."
- **Drink water.** Go for 8 ounces of water after each 30 minutes of gardening.
- **Wash up when you come indoors.** Taking a shower is best.

Spring Cleaning the Kitchen

Cleaning your refrigerator and pantry periodically is a good idea, even if it means throwing some food away. Start by removing all food items and cleaning the space before reorganizing. Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you determine what to keep and what to toss.

Check the date. "Sell-By" identifies how long the store can display the product for sale. "Best if Used By or Before" is the date recommended for best flavor or quality. "Use By" is a date determined by the manufacturer and indicates the date the product should be used by for peak quality. These are not safety dates, and often products can be safe to use beyond this date if they are properly handled and stored at home.

When in doubt, throw it out. Cans of food that are bulging or have leaks, or jars with unsealed lids should not be eaten. Signs that indicate food is spoiled include an off odor, flavor, or appearance (slimy, off color, etc.). Any food handled improperly can cause food-borne illness, before or after the date on the package. For example, if hot dogs are taken to a picnic and left out for several hours, they may not be safe to use. Check boxed or bagged foods for damage such as tears or holes. This can lead to insect infestation.

First in — first out. Frozen foods don't last forever. Evaluate foods for quality and safety. Make a list of what stays in your freezer along with the

purchase date on the product and plan to use the items stored the longest first. The same goes for canned and other packaged foods. Items that come into your home first should be used first.

Store food properly. Make sure your refrigerator maintains a temperature no higher than 40° F. Frozen foods will hold best in a freezer that maintains 0° F. Place a refrigerator/freezer thermometer in your appliance to check the temperatures. Shelf-safe foods, including canned items, should be stored in a cool, dry, and dark place. Avoid storage above the stove, under the sink, in a damp basement or any place with high or low temperatures.

Eating with the Seasons

All fruits and vegetables have a peak time when ripeness, flavor, and nutritional value are greatest. This is when fresh produce is least expensive and the freshest on the market.

It makes perfect sense to eat with the seasons to take advantage of the bounty and flavor, just as ancient civilizations ate what nature produced according to seasons. Farmers markets, self-pick farms, and stores will offer a variety of ripe, spring foods.

Look for a vibrant color and make sure food is not bruised (soft and mushy). Foods that are too firm are not ripe, which affects the taste and nutritional content.

When selecting fruit, gently squeeze it to make sure the skin is pliable, not mushy. The skin should not look pinched or wrinkled. Leafy foods should be bright green and crisp.



Foods to enjoy at their peak in spring include strawberries, apricots, cherries, blueberries, asparagus, sugar snap peas, carrots, onions, spinach, broccoli, leafy greens, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, peas, radishes, rhubarb and more!

Very Berry Spinach Salad

Makes 8 servings

Ingredients:

Salad:

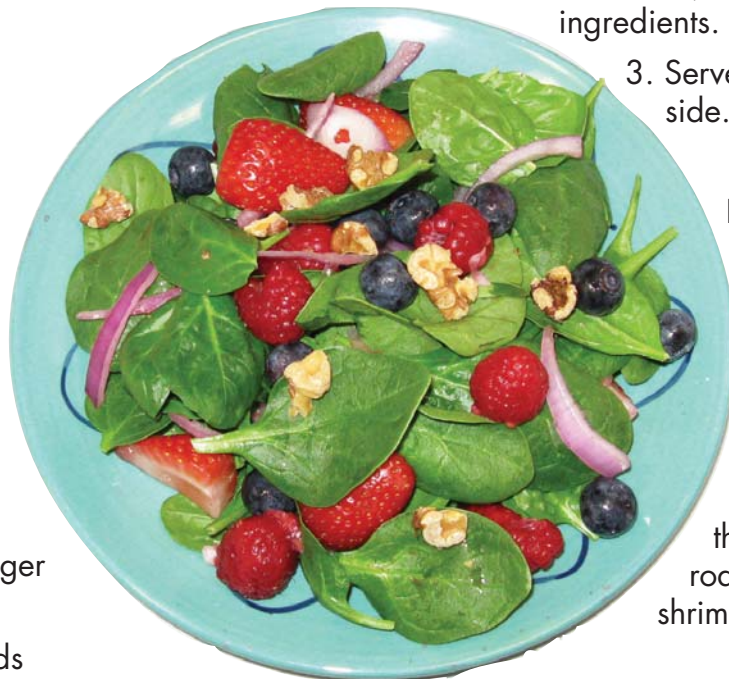
- 1 package (9 ounces) fresh spinach
- 4 cups fresh strawberries, raspberries, blueberries
- ¼ cup sliced red onion
- ¼ cup toasted walnuts

Dressing:

- ¼ cup confectioner's sugar
- ¼ cup raspberry vinegar
- 2 tablespoons orange juice
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ cup canola oil
- ½ teaspoon poppy seeds

Directions:

1. In a large serving bowl, combine spinach, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and red onion. Sprinkle toasted walnuts on top.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.
3. Serve salad with dressing on the side.



Nutrition information per serving:

140 calories, 10 g fat (0 g trans fat), 14 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 100 mg sodium.

Put MyPlate on your table: For a meal, double the salad serving size, add roasted turkey, chicken, or shrimp, and a whole-grain roll.