The Health Benefits of Gardening for Diabetics

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Diabetes and Gardening

One of the biggest things to come to terms with when receiving a diagnosis of diabetes is that it is a condition you will have to manage for the rest of your life.

Hopefully, that life will be a long, happy and healthy one and the more you can do to get and keep blood glucose under control the more likely that outcome is.

The best way to achieve good control, aside from any diabetes medication, is through eating a diabetic-friendly diet and exercise. I hate the word “diet” because it implies a regime of denial when in fact any healthy diet should include a variety of foods including treats.

There’s a great way to use exercise into daily life and potentially improve your diet too – take up gardening.

Even if you only have a tiny space you can grow herbs and salad vegetables to liven up your food – imagine topping pasta with a fresh and tasty tomato, garlic and basil sauce made from ingredients you have grown yourself?

If you have a bigger space or the option to take on a plot in a community garden you can burn some serious calories, tone up and grow enough food to keep a family in fruit and veg all year round.

How Do I Start Gardening?

If you’ve never done anymore in the yard than mow the grass and pressure wash the decking, it can be daunting to start thinking about growing plants which need a little more TLC.

Start with simple, hardy fruits and vegetables like tomatoes, zucchini, beans, strawberries, apples, and peaches. Use tubs or borders to plants herbs like oregano, rosemary, mint, parsley, and cilantro.

All of these can be used in diabetic friendly recipes like a tasty ratatouille, fruit salad or baked apple.

There’s lots of information online and in books about plant varieties, ideal planting times and places and what is suitable for each region’s soil and weather.

However, you might find the expertise of staff at your nearest garden center more useful, especially since they will have local knowledge.

Is Gardening an Expensive Hobby?

A walk around any garden center can make your jaw drop – you can spend a considerable amount of money if

you buy all of the gadgets and products, and mature plants.

Save dollars by growing plants from seeds or seedlings or checking out local plant sales where you can pick up lovely specimens for a fraction of the price of the garden center.

Having said that many garden centers run great loyalty programs and sometimes offer special deals for older people or on specific days.

And while it might be nice to have the latest power tools, many garden jobs can be done (albeit with a little more effort) with cheaper hand tools. Just think about all the extra calories you will be burning keeping your blood sugars in check!

What Are the Health Benefits of Gardening With Diabetes?

Exercise is one of the main benefits.

Did you know to clear land for 30 minutes burns around 200 calories while weeding for 30 minutes burns about 182 calories, and planting bulbs or seeds for half an hour burns about 162 calories?

Bending, walking and stretching all help keep your heart and body healthy. Use rainwater collected in a barrel to water plants with an old-style watering can rather than using a hosepipe or sprinkler system. This method adds to the number of steps you do each day, tones up arms and avoids water wastage too.

Even just wandering around the garden to check on progress is better than slumping in front of the TV and you are less likely to munch on chips while doing it.

Growing your own produce means you are much more likely to want to eat it. Nothing beats the flavor of something you have made from scratch with your own ingredients.

Make soups, smoothies and pasta sauces and batch freeze for healthy nutritious diabetes-friendly meals out of season or for when you are tired or busy. It’s just as quick and easy to warm up a delicious red pepper and tomato soup as it is to heat a calorie and fat-laden ready meal.

What If I Don’t Have a Suitable Yard to Garden In?

If you really don’t have a suitable yard and there isn’t a community garden near you why not start one? Check out the website for the American Community Garden Association and see if there is a group near you, one in the planning stages or read their tips on how to start one.

Alternatively, why not ask at your place of worship, community center or doctor’s office if they can put you in touch with someone unable to manage their own larger garden who might appreciate some free help in return for a share of the flowers, fruit, and vegetables grown.

Or volunteer at a day-care center where they might have an open space just begging to be developed.

It might sound a lot of effort but when you see the results and the health benefits, it will all have been worth it.