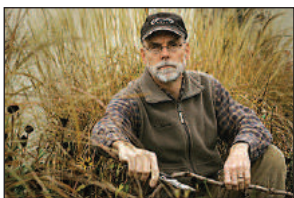


PULLING FOR GOOD HEALTH



Steve Renquist
Extension Spotlight

Unhealthy lifestyles can be overturned by gardening

I recently read an article talking about the unhealthy lifestyles of most Americans. The article reported information from a study conducted by Oregon State University, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

Researchers analyzed four categories of someone's behavior to decide whether they lived a healthy lifestyle. The categories included eating a balanced diet, being active, meeting the recommended criteria for percent body fat and not smoking.

Using data from a large national health and nutrition examination survey, the researchers found that 97.3 percent of the nearly 5,000 people evaluated did not meet the criteria for overall good health.

With so many people falling short of a healthy lifestyle, I would like to encourage everyone to take the first steps in turning to some proven healthy practices. Gardening can help provide the fresh fruit and vegetables needed for a balanced diet, it also will get you off the couch and active the year around, and that extra activity and good food should help lower body fat.

Growing your own vegetables and fruits provides a fresher, often healthier local source of food. The practice of mixing food and ornamentals into edible landscapes is also a very popular topic, and is a sustainable practice that works well for small yards.

If you don't have the expertise to grow your own food yet, let the Master Gardeners teach you how to produce food crops in a sustainable fashion.

Any good gardener can tell you that it takes physical exercise to maintain a garden. Exercise is always considered one of the key inputs to a healthy body and mind. And contrary to walking, jogging, or riding a bike, gardening takes place in your landscape



GETTY IMAGES

Growing your own vegetables can provide a fresher, often healthier, source of food.

surrounded by plants that are cleaning the air.

Many of the other exercise activities take place on the road where you are breathing in car exhaust or dodging cars. And if you worry that you are not getting enough aerobic exercise while gardening, try spreading compost or mulch around all of your gardens by wheelbarrow. I guarantee that it will get your heart pumping.

Being outdoors in our gardens not only provides physical exercise but allows us to make physical contact with nature. This physical connection with nature means that we can better understand

the ecological services that land provides.

Services like habitat for wildlife which includes insects, food sources for pollinators, natural water absorbing surfaces that feed ground water, allowing leaves and other organic waste to be recycled on our property to enhance the soil, and layers of vegetation in our landscape that approximate the original biomass of our forests to clean air and cool our cities.

Our garden is one of the only places where many of us make contact with nature, and this contact has a calming, stress reducing, positive impact on us.

If you aren't a gardener, why not begin this year for a healthier lifestyle.

The Master Gardeners' Plant Clinic is open 1 to 4 p.m., Monday thru Friday (April - September). They can be reached at the Douglas County OSU Extension Service office at 541-236-3052. Their office days change during the remainder of the year.

Steve Renquist is the Horticulture Extension Agent for OSU Extension Service of Douglas County. Steve can be reached by email renquist@oregonstate.edu or phone at 541-672-4461.