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It's about health and wellness: Gardening is an activity with multiple benefits

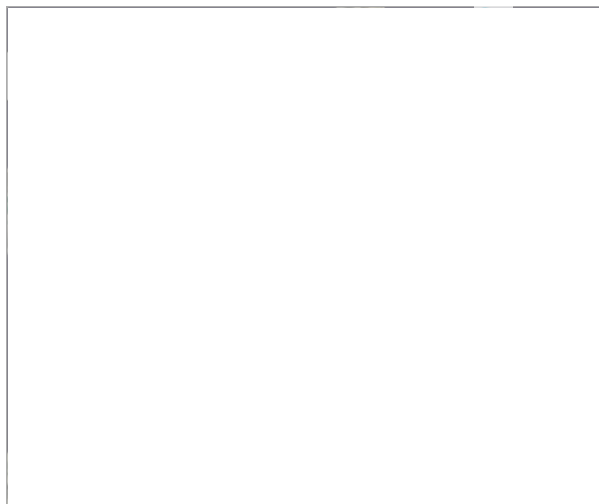
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Bloom

Although the snow, frozen ground and ice tell a different story, spring and warmer weather are just around the corner, and with the change in weather comes thoughts of gardens, warm soil and fresh vegetables. Seed catalogs are already flooding mailboxes and gardeners of all types — from beginning to the very experienced — are beginning to plan their 2021 gardens.

Gardening has many benefits, health and otherwise. Gardening is a way to get some of the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day for adults and youth. Raking, weeding and hauling hoses gets the heart rate up. Working outside is relaxing and can help with depression and aids with sleep.



A garden is also a source of fresh produce during the summer months and beyond. Produce can be preserved through freezing, drying or canning. Some vegetables that lend themselves well to freezing include green beans, broccoli and corn. Many vegetables also can be dried for use in soups in the fall and winter. Herbs also dry well (and quickly) using a food dehydrator or just left on the counter. Fruits dry well and can be made into fruit leathers for healthy snacks. Tomatoes and other vegetables are also able to be preserved through canning using either a water-bath canning method or a pressure canner. For more information on food preservation methods, contact your county Extension Service office or visit the Extension Service website at www.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation.

Gardening can be educational in teaching children about the life cycle of plants and the importance of composting in adding nutrients back into the soil. Children can plant seeds, water and pull weeds from garden beds. They can be taught the whys and how-tos of thinning and, when the vegetables are ripe, how to harvest. Children also can learn simple preparation methods in the kitchen, from washing and drying the lettuce for a salad to shelling peas and snapping the ends from the bush beans.

Will this be the year you plant pole beans or try Zebra tomatoes? How about that new variety of zucchini or will it be three types of basil for a new twist on your favorite pesto recipe? Is this the year you experiment with parsnips? Whichever way you go, maybe Oregon State University can help.

For the second year, OSU is running the Grow This! challenge to encourage and help Oregonians to grow their own gardens. OSU is making seed kits available to individuals, groups, schools and other organizations around the state as a way of encouraging those who have never tried gardening and helping experienced gardeners try new varieties of seeds. The seed kits are free and contain packets of vegetable seeds (packets for cool and warm growing seasons), herbs and/or edible flowers and flower seeds which encourage pollination by bees and other pollinating insects.

Master Gardeners in Oregon are also participating in the Grow This! program and providing feedback on which seeds are successful growing in different parts of the state in different growing conditions.

The seeds are free through a generous donation from Bi-Mart. There are only 8,000 seed kits available statewide. The seeds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Anyone interested in a seed kit can now sign up using the link www.foodhero.org/growthis. Seed kits will be available until they are gone, but anyone can participate with their own seeds. Seed kits will be delivered to county Extension Service offices and those who have ordered seed kits will be notified when they may pick up their kits.

Educational gardening videos, how-tos and hand-outs, live question-and-answer sessions on Facebook and email support will be offered during the growing season April 1 through September.

For more information or to order a seed kit go to www.foodhero.org/growthis.

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