

The five stages of gardening



The Island Garden

By Roger Marshall

I was cutting the hedge last weekend, whaling away with the hedge trimmer, when it occurred to me that gardening has a lot to recommend it. It is an all around physical activity that can keep you fit and trim throughout your lifetime.

It can also provide you with fresh vegetables, berries, and fruit, some wonderful displays of flowers, attract lots of birds and other wildlife and make your environment totally enjoyable.

For example, how often do you exercise with weights on a stair-stepper? Instead, try swinging a hedge trimmer for a few hours while climbing up and down a ladder. How often do you go for a run in the morning? Try pushing a wheelbarrow full of mulch uphill instead. How often do you do you bend over with your legs straight? Try weeding for an hour or two.

How often do you go for a walk? Try mowing the lawn. All these exercises neat up your garden and cost you nothing, just a little effort... and backache, knee pain, and sore shoulders when you're done! But, hey, you didn't have to pay for a subscription to a gym and your yard looks a whole lot nicer.

The beauty of gardening is that you can do as much and how much you want to do at any one time. I look upon gardening as being in five stages.

The first stage begins when you are young and a novice gardener. At this stage you turn your yard into lawn and double-dig a vegetable patch using a garden fork, vowing to turn vegan and be fit all your life. You mow the lawn with a reel push mower because you want to stay fit. You let deer and wild animals take their share of your produce, because they have to eat, too. The newly planted privet hedge is only two feet high.

Stage two comes when you realize that mowing a lawn is hard work and needs to be done weekly so you buy a walk behind power mower. To cut down on mowing time you add a flower bed or two and mulch them heavily. After a year or two, all you do is refresh the mulch in spring. Your

are in the greenhouse because the dog you got to keep the deer away likes to pee on the plant pots. Inside the privet hedge, which is now eight feet high, you've put a chain link fence to keep the dog in and the deer out.

Stage four comes when you buy a riding mower to cut the grass, a rototiller to dig the garden and you harvest the crops you can still reach. The flower garden becomes a wildflower garden that you mow at the end of summer (with the riding mower). The vegetable garden looks like Alcatraz to keep the deer and animals out and the dog is flopped by the fireplace, too tired to chase wildlife. The privet hedge has been removed leaving just the chain link fence.

Stage five occurs when you buy a condominium and relax on the lawn (that somebody else cuts), buy your vegetables (that somebody else grows) at the local farm stand, and keep a few flowers in a hanging basket. This allows you and your dog to lie in the lawn chair and watch the deer eat the next door neighbor's garden.

What stage are you at?

vegetable garden has expanded to include a cold frame to help you get crops in colder weather. By this time you've read Eliot Coleman and tried to figure out how to grow year round in Rhode Island. Your garden is now protected with a deer fence and your flowers get sprayed with Deer Off. The privet hedge is now four feet high and very thick.

Stage three comes when you want to go on vacation and realize that your yard takes up way too much time, or when your job becomes all consuming and you are working in the yard before sunup and after you've finished work. You now have a heated greenhouse that allows you to garden all winter and to work under lights until bedtime. All your valuable plants



Team work

Alyssa Gibbs and Aaron Ferrara work together to win their sack race at the Melrose Avenue School annual field day. The day had been rescheduled from its original date because of the recent rainy weather.

Photo by Andrea vonHohenleiten

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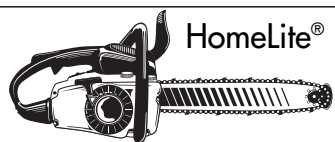
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Top: Sarah Ferraro and baby Will at South County Hospital.
Bottom (L-R): Lisa S. Rameaka, MD; Mary Christina Simpson, MD; Steven H. Schneider, MD; Jill M. Samale, MD; Jeffrey F. Joseph, MD

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