

Old Fart Gardening?

By Connie Jackson

Erie County Master Gardener

Old Fart Gardener? What? Who can get away with that? They haven't even met me!

Backtrack and let me explain. I have a new hip, a new right hip...and a walker...and a cane...and a grabber...and a limp....and a deliberation to my every movement...and a good prognosis. I am on the mend! But for the last couple of years, my gardening tasks and cleaning tasks (Yeah!) have been somewhat curtailed.

The politically correct term is not "Old Fart Gardening," but "adaptive gardening." I was surprised when I Googled "adaptive gardening" to find a link on the University of California Agricultural and Natural Resources website labeled "Old Fart Gardening." They are not the same. Adaptive gardening is so much more, and the UCANR website offers a workable definition: using the tools and techniques already used in gardening to fit the needs of people of various physical abilities. Gardening adaptations can be used with the elderly, for people with a limited range of motions or mobility, those with impaired vision or slower reaction times or decreased muscle strength, anyone wanting to reduce stress on joints, the disabled, amputees, those with health issues such as MS, dementia, those suffering from severe arthritis, which was my case.

The website further advises gardeners to first assess themselves and their gardens. What can you do; what can't you do? What does your garden look like? Can you adapt your gardens to better mesh your abilities with your garden's needs?

Many state extension offices have conducted research with tips and suggestions for helping you out. Check out Washington State University at Spokane which offers a "Gardening for Life" pamphlet that covers a wide range of adaptations for gardening challenges. Topics addressed include garden design, plant selection, adequate lighting, proper lifting, warm-up exercises, gardening techniques including vertical gardens, container gardens, raised beds, garden tools, and sensory gardens. I have been adaptive gardening for the past several years and didn't realize it. My commonsense adaptations have worked for the most part and recent research indicates that I am on the right track. I just need to work smarter and keep things going.

Some suggestions that have worked for me include raised beds which are more easily accessible. We have raised beds. A rain barrel or irrigation close to the gardens makes watering much easier and rain water is budget friendly. A gardening stool, a Mother's Day gift from last year, makes bending, planting, weeding, and harvesting much easier. Thanks, John.

The Ohio State has a segment of their research devoted to tools that make gardening easier. Purdue offers more adaptive gardening research, also Cornell, Virginia Tech, Colorado State, Alaska State – adaptive gardening is a hot topic. Do you have some special challenges? Help is available.

My plan? Additional containers will allow me to concentrate my efforts on a smaller area and give plants better care. Clear paths are essential. Gravel or hard paths offer greater stability than soil or grass paths. I have also purged some of my “stuff” and gotten better organized. We have fewer levels and steps in the garden. Plantings have been simplified. A garden bench offers a spot to rest; a cell phone, water bottle, sunscreen and a hat are always at hand. Grandchildren can often be coaxed into helping. I have downsized, but I am still having fun. I am going to work smarter. I am also going to read more gardening books and magazines and dream more. I can enjoy the beauty of the garden and being in nature without lifting a finger. Simply relax and enjoy.

I feel that I am good to go for another season and it may be my best yet! Adaptive gardening is key.

Upcoming Master Gardener Events:

April 15 – Deadline to apply for a Master Gardener Scholarship. Consult the website for an application and more information –

April 20 – Earth Day at Osborn Park; check out our booth

May 11- Plant sale at the Erie County Fairgrounds 9 - noon

September – a new MG class starts. Call 419-627-7631 if interested in becoming a Master Gardener.

In other Erie County Master Gardener news, our Erie County annual plant sale is Saturday, may at the fairgrounds from . Stop by and check us out. Master Gardeners dig and divide plants from their gardens to sell. Proceeds support our scholarship program. Hope to see you there.

We will also have a booth at the Earth Day activities at Erie Metroparks. On . Stop by there also.