



Gardening ASANAS

Yoga Poses to Stay Pain-Free

by Marlaina Donato

Gardening is good for body and soul, but long hours and repetitive movements can negatively impact even the fittest body. While stiffness and pain patterns might manifest in the lower back, shoulders, legs and hands, performing a few yoga poses can lessen pain, increase flexibility, boost stamina and prevent injury.

“Every action needs a counter action for structural balance to be maintained. Repetitive movements can tighten fascia, restrict movement and compromise nerve impulses,” explains Ashville, North Carolina, yoga teacher and back care specialist Lillah Schwartz, author of *Healing Our Backs with Yoga: An Essential Guide to Back Pain Relief*. “What goes into spasm tends to remain in spasm,” observes Schwartz, who has helped many people overcome back pain and other chronic structural issues.

Practicing yoga before, during or after spending time outside also promotes mind-body awareness which helps us tune into our body’s natural rhythms and prevent physical problems in the first place. Here are some basics to consider when working in the garden.

Be Aware

Great agility and strong muscles cannot compensate for being in one position too long, over-reaching or fatigue. “Listen to your body’s messages such as, ‘It’s time for a rest,’ or, ‘That’s too heavy,’” recommends Schwartz. Remember to take regular breaks to rest, stretch and drink water.



Strike a Pose

Doing yoga regularly will condition the body, but incorporating *asanas*, or poses, while gardening can be both a fun and practical way to avoid overstretching certain muscle groups and keep the spine and hamstrings supple. Using props in the garden environment such as fences, a wall or a chair can provide convenient support.

Feel free to perform all poses before or after gardening, and all except numbers one and five in the garden.

1. Downward Facing Dog pose (*Adho Mukha Svanasana*) with feet placed against a support
2. Warrior 1 pose (*Virabhadrasana I*)
3. Straddle Forward Fold pose (*Prasarita Padottanasana*)

4. Standing Scissor Twist (*Parivrtta Hasta Padasana*) standing close to and bracing against a wall or fence

5. Locust pose (*Salabhasana*)

6. Squat Pull Spinal Traction (*Ardha Malasana in traction*)

Take a Breath

“Conscious breathing involves both the body and the mind. Long, slow inhalations and exhalations help us tune into our body,” says Schwartz. “Using long breaths when stretching in the garden can help muscles find relief.”

To reduce pain:

- Stop and breathe. Take slow, deep breaths with a pause (inhalation retention) between inhalation and exhalation.
- Don't resist the pain or allow self-judgment.
- Wait for a release.

Enjoy Being Outside

Bringing mindfulness to garden work not only helps prevent injury, but helps make it a more enjoyable experience. Here are a few more tips.

- If rising early, begin time in the garden with a Warrior 1 pose while facing east.
- Be mindful of feeling the breeze when it brushes the skin and pause to breathe deeply.
- Notice the music of the birds or other pleasing sounds in the surrounding environment.
- Stop to drink some water and take pleasure in the garden's beauty and bounty.

Marlaina Donato is a freelance writer, author and multimedia artist. Connect at MarlainaDonato.com.