



Designing a Garden *without* Barriers

By Jessie Eisenstein

The first snowfall may have brought with it new aches and pains that you fear will affect the time you spend in the garden. But before you decide to throw in the trowel, there are a number of ways to make gardening more comfortable.

Every garden requires some degree of maintenance. Certainly the process of gardening and the everchanging results of a well-tended garden are equally gratifying. However, the amount of work your garden will require should be largely dependent upon your physical abilities, time constraints and desires.

Winter is a good time to evaluate your garden and determine whether you need to make structural changes to compensate for changes in your strength or mobility. Once you resolve to structure your garden with your own abilities and needs in mind, you will stop feeling guilty for things you haven't done and begin to appreciate the work you have accomplished.

One change you may wish to make is gradually decreasing your lawn area, especially if you no longer have young children at home who use the backyard for a playing field. There is no reason to have the extra work of mowing a large lawn. A bed of low-maintenance groundcovers is a good option for a low-traffic area. Or you might consider massed shrubs instead; they provide privacy, and upkeep is minimal. Try transforming a section of the lawn by adding a bench and a birdbath for quiet enjoyment of your garden.

To make gardening easier, be practical when planning the placement of certain plants to save time and frustration. For example, plant your herb or vegetable garden near your kitchen. It

is practical because it is within your reach.

Keep this rule of thumb for all of your garden plantings. Why should you have to squeeze between bushes or densely planted perennials to weed and

inclement weather and keep them handy.

Make your garden safer for next season with routine inspections. Check backyard structures for cracks, splinters and loose screws. Be sure not to overlook your gardening tools as well. Keep them in good shape by cleaning, sharpening and oiling them; replace any tools that are beyond repair.

You can design your garden to suit any maintenance level you desire, and you may find yourself making small changes in its design each year. As long as you are able to adapt to change, you can look forward to a lifetime of gardening. **|**

Editor's note: For more information on making adjustments for easier gardening, contact

The American Horticultural Therapy Association, 326A Christopher Ave., Gaithersburg, MD 20879; 800-634-1603.

Suggested reading for creating a garden to suit your needs or disabilities:

The Enabling Garden by Gene Rothert, H.T.R. (Taylor Publishing, 1994). The book includes an extensive list of helpful resources along with diagrams for personal garden planning.

The Able Gardener: Overcoming Barriers of Age & Physical Limitations by Kathleen Yeomans, R.N. (Storey Communications Inc., 1993). The book deals with planning a barrier-free garden and good plants for successful gardening.

Accessible Gardening for People with Physical Disabilities: A Guide to Methods, Tools and Plants by Janeen R. Adil (Woodbine House, 1994). Gardeners with disabilities are given advice on adapting tools and creating new gardens that are more accessible with easier maintenance.



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water? Leave space to work and blanket bare ground with mulch so weeds don't crop up. If you suffer from back problems, look for long-handled tools that you can use without hunching over.

If pruning has become difficult to accomplish, eliminate hedges from your landscape, as well as flowering shrubs that require regular pruning to look their best. Replace them with plants that remain attractive without pruning.

Work with nature, using native plants and other plants that will thrive in your specific garden conditions. Don't make it more difficult for yourself; if you put shade-loving plants in a sunny location, you will need to water them much more often just to keep them alive.

If you are tired of carrying tools back and forth, consider leaving them in the garden. A sealed bucket will protect your pruning shears, gloves, trowels and other hand tools against