Top 10 Reasons to Garden

Why do you garden? In this new “stay at home” normal many gardeners have renewed their interest in gardening, and many novice gardeners are exploring the art of gardening for the first time.

University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator, Martha Smith, asked gardeners why they garden, and their responses are inspiring. Below are their top 10 reasons for gardening:

1. **Garden for safe, healthy food** – Interest in organic gardening and the availability of organic produce has increased. Consumers are aware of additives and preservatives found in processed foods. An easy solution is to grow your own fruits and vegetables. It’s estimated that during World War II 20 million homeowners had victory gardens that produced close to 40 percent of the fresh produce consumed in the United States. Start your own garden and know that the foods you and your family eat are fresh and safe.

2. **Garden for exercise** – You can get all the exercise you need in your own backyard for free! Gardening activities provide both cardio and aerobic exercise. Studies show that an hour of moderate gardening can burn up to 300 calories for women, and almost 400 calories for men. As we age, gardening can help reduce osteoporosis. If you have physical limitations, there are adaptive tools to help you get the job done.

3. **Garden for beauty** – A garden can enhance any outdoor setting. A house with a nice yard is a pleasure to look at and satisfying to live in. Trees and shrubs not only provide color and shade, but shelter for birds and wildlife. Think of the garden as another room to be enjoyed whether you are inside or outside the house.

4. **Garden to learn** – You can learn reading and you can learn by doing! Getting out and working with plants builds your gardening knowledge. Plant problems lead to learning solutions. Removing a problem plant allows you the opportunity to try something new.

5. **Garden to make money** – The love of plants can lead to a rewarding job at a local garden center or a large landscape firm or to owning your own business. Whether growing flowers, vegetables or herbs, there are opportunities to sell your products at local farmers markets. Landscaping an investment property can add to the resale value by as much as 15 percent.

6. **Garden to meet people** – Gardeners love to share their gardens and their knowledge. Gardening is a great way to expand your social circle. Whether it’s with a neighbor who lives next door or an Internet pal on the other side of the world, gardeners love to talk about plants. Meeting other gardeners through garden clubs and sharing surplus plants is an easy way to share information, ask questions, and get involved.

7. **Garden to be creative** – Gardening provides an outlet for creative and artistic expressions. The serene contemplative mood of a Japanese garden, or the romantic feel of a cottage garden – let your creativity flow! Try something new every season.

8. **Garden to win** – For people with a competitive streak, gardening is a friendly way to show off their skills. County and state fairs provide an opportunity to show everyone the giant pumpkin, beautiful beans, or the perfect zinnia. 4H clubs promote gardening, offering educational opportunities for kids and a healthy avenue for recognition.

9. **Garden for emotional needs** – Gardens play an important part in our well-being. A garden might serve as a tranquil retreat of private escape from the demands of everyday life. A beautiful bouquet can lift the spirits. Pulling weeds can be a great stress reliever. A healthy harvest provides a sense of achievement and feelings of success. Gardening builds confidence and self-esteem.
10. **Garden for lasting memories** – Gardening is a great activity that can be shared with children and grandchildren – the gardeners of tomorrow. Memories of past gardens and gardeners are cherished. Help build these memories for the next generation. Today’s kids might be missing the joy of cutting a bouquet of flowers for their mom or tasting the sweetness of a cherry tomato picked right from the plant in Grandpa’s garden.

“Whatever your reason – get out and garden,” Smith said. “Turn off the television and put down that electronic gadget. Don’t tell yourself you don’t have the time. Find the time and enjoy.”

Can you add to this list? Why do you garden? Who taught you to garden? Is there a youngster that you can share the joy of gardening with?