

# AN EASIER WAY

Ergonomic tools can make gardening easier for everyone.

By Carrie Burns



**B**elieve it or not, gardening can be a very dangerous activity. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported that about 230,000 people each year are treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries relating to various lawn and garden tools. In fact, the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) included landscapers in its list of the 10 most occupations that cause back pain. Now, I know that landscapers are doing this all day every day and are more likely to experience pain, but it just goes to show you how damaging the activity can be on the body.

Manufacturers have been working diligently on ergonomic gardening products over the last few years. They have made improvements on special grips; minimal-vibration power tools; and long-handled tools, modifying them to lessen the strain on the back. Now, there are a large number of ergonomic products from shovels to stools, for every age and size. It makes sense for there to be ergonomic tools for seniors. It is as important as ever for the elderly to be able to use products that are easy on the body. As our Baby Boomer gardeners and customers grow older, it becomes more difficult to do the daily chores they used to do, such as trimming hedges or pulling weeds. These new products are helping them do just that.

But elderly gardeners aren't the only ones who would benefit from ergonomic tools. Ergonomic tools can prevent cumulative trauma disorders (CTD), which include disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome, thoracic outlet syndrome and even

tendonitis. CTD is a response to excessive demands placed on the body. Most CTDs are caused when movement is applied to muscles and joints in the same way on a consistent basis and causes wear and tear. And gardening contains many of the CTD characteristics — kneeling, bending, repetitive hand movements, etc. — especially for the exhaustive gardener.

Ergonomics has been studied for many years by, you guessed it, ergonomists. They study the interaction between human beings and tools, environments and tasks of work and everyday living. The goal of ergonomic tools is to create a safer product that causes less fatigue and stress on the body. The results can include improved health and safety and increased productivity.

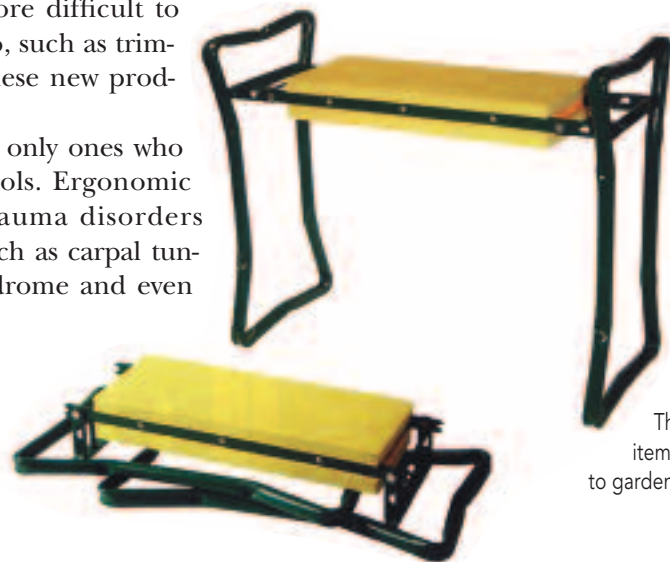
## WHY ERGONOMICS?

Fiskars provides useful garden ergonomics information on its Web site. Below are a few primary CTD risk factors Fiskars highlights:

**Repetitiveness.** Trimming hedges, pruning bushes or planting bulbs often require the same muscles to be used over and over.

**Posture.** More than your body position, posture includes things such as the angle the wrist is held. Grip strength is at its maximum when the wrist is in a relaxed or neutral position. A bent wrist is dangerous. The tendons responsible for flexing the fingers are easily irritated by exertions made while in this posture.

**Contact Stress.** Many tools are made with finger grips molded into the handle, to provide better slip resistance. However, these form-fitting grooves only fit one size hand perfectly. People with larger hands will find



## Kneeler/seat

The Deluxe Gardener's Folding Kneeler/Seat alleviates neck and back strain. The item can extend as a seat or fold down to allow the gardener cushion when kneeling to garden. The Rumford Gardener. (800) 234-1957. **Write in 1410**

## SPREAD THE NEWS

Your customers could benefit from a few tool tips from Karen Funkenbusch and Willard Downs from the University of Missouri Extension. Whatever style of tool your customers choose, there are a few universal pointers that will help them garden:

- Use tools with the right size grip; to find the right fit, make a circle with your index finger and thumb. That is the size the grip of your tools should be.
- Try to find tools with a depression or ridge in the handle for your thumb to rest on, this will keep your hand in the proper alignment.
- Use tools with longer handles to cut down on the need to bend over or kneel.
- Keep tools sharp and in good condition to conserve energy.
- Use the lightest weight tool possible to complete tasks.
- Work to keep your back straight and your joints in neutral positions to prevent joint stress.
- Use tools with a soft, pliable handle for easier gripping.
- Use nonslip surfaces so not to waste energy gripping tools too tightly.

More information on ergonomic gardening and safety in the garden can be found at [www.fse.missouri.edu/gardenweb](http://www.fse.missouri.edu/gardenweb).



### Ergonomic tool

The Handle Helper was designed to fit most lawn and garden tools. It helps reduce blisters and fatigue by placing the hand in a more comfortable position. Easily adjustable, the Handle Helper can position itself anywhere on the handle of a yard tool for best comfort. Available in green and orange. Ashton Home Products, Inc. (877) 875-1926. **Write in 1401**

### Shoe cleaner

Neat Feet has been tested in the Northwest for 10 years and proven to get mud, dirt, snow, grass and sand off shoes. The patented design blends a precision molded plastic frame and specially selected bristles. There is no wood to rot or metal to rust. Well suited for the home, RV, cabin and condo. Neat Feet is U.S. made and comes in a display pack of 10. Richard Brush. (800) 732-1110. **Write in 1404**



that their fingers overlap the ridges, causing pain, soreness and calluses. Those with smaller hands will have to spread their fingers to match the grooves, and strength testing has shown that this spreading of the fingers significantly reduces grip strength, requiring more pressure to maintain control of the tool.

**Forceful Exertion.** Pruning activities require the application of force by the hands and/or arms on the tools that do the cutting. Depending on the material being cut, the design of the blades and many other factors, the force required may be high or low. 📖

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### Spray gun

The Revolver spray gun has a nine-pattern, revolving turret to aid in mixing and matching the water stream to the outdoor task. An ergonomic, insulated grip protects hands from extreme water temperatures. The die-cast metal body and fiberglass reinforced nylon lever ensure a long-lasting, dependable product that's guaranteed for a lifetime. Dramm. (920) 684-0228. **Write in 1407**



### Trowel

This harvest hand tool line has red oak handles and heavy-gauge, polished stainless steel blades. The ergonomically designed handle provides comfort when gardening. Unconditional lifetime warranty, value and customer support all come with this trowel. Brook & Hunter. (888) 827-6658. **Write in 1400**



### Electric tiller

The Garden Wizard electric minitiller is designed and built to meet the rigorous demands of active gardeners and landscapers. The 12-amp motor produces more output torque than comparable gas minitillers. With the squeeze of a trigger, it is easy to start every time. This lightweight Garden Wizard cultivates to a width of 10 inches and up to 8 inches deep. The tines can be removed without using tools for cleaning or repair. Additionally, the item converts to a storable shape. The Remington Garden Wizard carries a two-year, limited warranty and is UL listed to ensure safe operation. Remington. (800) 858-8501. **Write in 1405**



### Broom

The Landscaper's Push Broom, a two-in-one garden tool that doubles as a heavy-duty push broom and an aluminum rake, is ideal for spreading, sweeping or raking garden mulch, leaves and debris of any size. It is designed with an 18-inch solid hardwood block with stiff poly fibers on one side and rust-proof, aluminum rake tines on the other side. A 60-inch solid hardwood handle complements the tool, allowing for maximum durability on multiple surfaces. Quickie Manufacturing Corporation. (856) 829-7900. **Write in 1409** ▶



**Feminine tools**

The Tools for Her kit contains the following tools with designer floral handles: five-in-one hammer/screwdriver, six-in-one screwdriver, scissors, slip joint pliers, 10-foot tape measure and utility knife. All tools are contained in a handy carrying/storage box. Available in two patterns. FPC Corporation. (847) 487-4583. **Write in 1406**



**Sprinkler system**

Sprinkler Stations are permanent, can be installed easily and operate by simply connecting a garden hose. They can be adapted with a splitter to the faucet to use with more than one hose. The stations carry a five-year replacement warranty. A "winterizing" feature can be installed to prevent damage by water freezing and expanding inside the sprinkler. Three sprinkler styles are available: Original covers a 70-foot diameter; Junior covers a 30-foot diameter with mist; and Squared covers a 9x18-foot, 4x15-foot or 4x40-foot area with mist. Watering Made Easy. (877) 280-4485. **Write in 1402**



**Seed cover**

Grass-Fast Grass Seed Cover provides a fast way to grow grass. It is easy to use and avoids the mess of laying down and then later picking up straw. It offers improved seed germination versus straw. In addition, watering every few days with Grass-Fast is sufficient. When grass has grown to the appropriate height within a few short weeks, the cover can be easily removed and folded for future use. The cover creates warmth, retains moisture and vents excess heat, which all combine to increase and speed seed germination. Each roll measures 40 inches wide by 50 feet long and is packed 28 rolls per case in a display box. Dalen Products Inc. (800) 747-3256. **Write in 1408**



**Kits**

Children will be encouraged to garden when they have their own equipment. The Little Garden Angels line allows them to do just that. The Little Garden Angels range provides gardening sets and tools to encourage children to discover the excitement of growing their own flowers and vegetables. Three kits are available: Flower Garden (shown), Vegetable Garden and Sunflower Kit. Threesixty Innovation. 4 401 623 726 990. **Write in 1411**



**Shovel**

The Sno-Dozer is a high-performance snow shovel on wheels. The ergonomic design reduces back strain, and the wheels make shoveling snow easy. Ideal for up to 6 inches of snowfall, this shovel has a large, 30-inch, 16-gauge steel blade and a soft comfort grip that provides insulation and control. Vertex. (877) 2VERTEX. **Write in 1409**



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