

Gardening linked to increased vegetable consumption in older adults

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New research from Texas A&M University and Texas State University found that older adults who participate in gardening may be more likely to eat their veggies. The report, published in HortTechnology, presents the results of an online survey of adults aged 50+ and includes recommendations for promoting gardening "intervention" programs to older adults.

According to researchers Aime Sommerfeld, Amy McFarland, Tina Waliczek, and Jayne Zajicek, studies have shown that poor nutrition is one of several factors responsible for mortality and morbidity in the elderly and is comparable to deaths caused from cigarette smoking. "Although [older adults](#) tend to report a higher intake of [fruit](#) and vegetables than other age groups, over half of the U.S. older population does not meet the recommendation of five daily servings of fruit and vegetables." They added that several previous research studies confirmed that gardening is one way to increase individuals' fruit and vegetable intake.

The objectives of the study were to examine and compare fruit and vegetable consumption of gardeners and nongardeners, and to investigate differences in fruit and [vegetable consumption](#) of long-term gardeners compared with newer gardeners. To collect the information, an online survey was posted on a web site for one month; 261 questionnaires were completed by adults aged 50 years and older.

"Our results support previous studies that indicated gardeners were more

likely to consume vegetables when compared with nongardeners. Interestingly, these results were not found with regard to fruit consumption", stated Waliczek, corresponding author of the study. The responses also showed that the length of time an individual reported having participated in gardening activities seemed to have no relationship to the number of vegetables and fruits they reportedly consumed. "This suggests that gardening intervention programs late in life would be an effective method of boosting vegetable and fruit consumption in older adults."

The number of hours per week individuals spent gardening did not appear to be a factor in vegetable and fruit consumption; the researchers observed that this indicates that even older adults with limited time or abilities—those who spend less time gardening—may consume greater quantities of vegetables and fruits than their nongardening counterparts.

Finally, the survey results showed that a person's reason for gardening had no relationship with the quantity of [vegetables](#) and fruit consumed, implying that programs designed to encourage older adults to participate in gardening need not exclusively promote the health benefits derived from [gardening](#), but may appeal to a range of personal motives.

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site: horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/20/4/711

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