

# Want more zest for life? Consider gardening

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Researchers at Texas A&M and Texas State found that gardening contributes to increased life satisfaction in older adults. Credit: Photo courtesy of Tina Marie (Waliczek) Cade

Does gardening contribute to quality of life and increased wellness for older adults? Researchers from the Texas A&M and Texas State Universities asked these questions in a survey of people aged 50 and older. The survey revealed some compelling reasons for older adults to get themselves out in the garden.

Aime Sommerfeld, Jayne Zajicek, and Tina Waliczek designed a questionnaire to investigate older adult gardeners' and nongardeners' perceptions of personal life satisfaction and levels of physical activity. According to Sommerfeld, lead author of the study published in HortTechnology: "The primary focus of the study was to determine if gardening had a positive impact on perceptions of quality of life and levels of physical activity of [older adults](#) when compared with nongardeners".

A 2007 Administration on Aging report titled A Profile of Older Americans noted that one in every eight Americans is considered an "older adult" (65+ years). The older adult population is at

greater risk for disease as a result of decreased levels of exercise and poor dietary and/or lifestyle choices; a combination of moderate physical activity and increased consumption of fruit and vegetables has been reported to dramatically reduce an adult's risk for many chronic diseases. "Gardening is one of the most popular home-based leisure activities in the United States and has been reported as the second most common leisure activity, after walking, of adults older than age 65 years", the researchers noted.

To find out more about the health and attitudes of older adult who garden, Sommerfeld and colleagues designed a survey based on the Life Satisfaction Inventory A (LSIA), a tool that measures five components of quality of life: "zest for life," "resolution and fortitude," "congruence between desired and achieved goals," "physical, psychological, and social self-concept," and "optimism." Additional multiple choice questions were asked to determine respondents' level of physical activity, perceptions of overall health and well-being, as well as to gather demographic information. The survey was posted on a university homepage for one month. Responses were gathered from 298 participants who differentiated themselves as gardeners or nongardeners by responding positively or negatively to the simple question "do you garden?"

The researchers found significant differences in overall life satisfaction scores, with gardeners receiving higher mean scores (indicating more positive results) on the LSIA. Sommerfeld, Zajicek, and Waliczek explained: "More than 84% of gardeners agreed with the statement, "I have made plans for things I'll be doing a month or a year from now" compared with only 68% of nongardeners." Significant differences between gardeners and nongardeners were also noted in the "energy level" statement, "I feel old and somewhat tired". Gardeners disagreed with the statement at a rate of 70.9%, whereas 57.3% of nongardeners disagreed with the statement.

Older adults who garden also reported a higher level of daily physical activity compared to nongardening respondents. Over three times as many nongardeners (14.71%) considered themselves to be "quite inactive.", while only 4.43% of gardener said the same. "Almost twice as many gardeners (38%) considered themselves to be "very active" compared with only 19.6% of nongardeners", noted the study.

More than 75% of gardeners who participated in the survey rated their health as either "very good" or "excellent". Gardeners also reported eating more fruit and vegetables because of their exposure to gardening. "These factors, in conjunction with higher physical activity, result in healthier lifestyles and increased quality of life", the researchers wrote.

The study presents strong evidence that gardening can be an effective way for older adults to increase [life satisfaction](#) while also increasing [physical activity](#). "In a time when older adults are living longer and enjoying more free time, gardening offers the opportunity to fulfill needs created by changing lifestyles. Gardening provides participants with opportunities to reconnect with themselves through nature and a healthy activity to enhance their quality of life", Sommerfeld concluded.

**More information:** The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site:

[horttech.ashspublications.org/ ...  
nt/abstract/20/4/705](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/20/4/705)

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