

April 2017

Asset HealthTalk

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know



Health Benefits Bloom From Gardening

As the saying goes, April showers bring May flowers, so what better time to get your garden up and running so you can enjoy it next month and beyond. There are many advantages of gardening in addition to being surrounded with beautiful flowers. The health benefits of gardening are so well-established that horticulture therapy is now used to address a host of mental and physical ailments.

Emotional Benefits

Digging in the dirt is not only fun, it can boost your mood. Dirt contains mycobacterium vaccae – a natural antidepressant. Additionally, the act of gardening can stimulate insights, prompt an awareness of one's surroundings and enhance mental clarity. The rewards of harvest can cultivate feelings of pride, confidence and a sense of accomplishment.



Physical Perks

The CDC categorizes gardening as moderate-intensity physical activity. Hauling wheelbarrows, digging, planting, weeding and the like are all forms of physical activity, and active people are less likely to be obese or experience high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and other serious medical conditions.



Vitamin D

Gardening gets you out in the sun and sunlight sparks a chemical process in your body that produces vitamin D. Low vitamin D levels are associated with poor bone health and other serious conditions. While excess sunlight can lead to skin cancers, a moderate amount can have preventive benefits against other cancers.



Quality Produce

Home gardens are typically filled with organic produce that are free of harmful chemicals. Homegrown produce often tastes better and are fresher than store-bought varieties. According to research, gardeners tend to eat more fruits and veggies than their peers.



Community Connections

If you don't have room at home to plant a large garden, see if community garden plots are available. In addition to adding green space to your neighborhood, community gardens can foster communal spirit and pride. They also provide a great way to meet people of all different backgrounds as you tend your garden.



Plant a garden for your senses – flowering varieties that are pleasing to the eye, fragrant varieties to fill your yard with aromatic scents and fruits and vegetables to satisfy your taste buds. If you're not ready to commit to a time-intensive garden, start by growing herbs indoors or creating a container garden to spruce up your outdoor space.

"Why Gardening Is Good for Your Health," Anne Harding, cnn.com, July 8, 2011.

"What Are the Physical and Mental Benefits of Gardening?" Julia Darnton, msue.anr.msu.edu, May 19, 2014.

"The Benefits of Vitamin D," Healthline Editorial Team, healthline.com, June 23, 2016.

Prebiotics MAY HELP RELIEVE YOUR NIGHTTIME STRESS

A new study suggests that getting your fill of foods rich in prebiotics may help you cope with stress. Researchers from the University of Colorado discovered in their study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, that regular amounts of prebiotics in your diet can:

- help promote a better balance of gut bacteria; and
- help our bodies recover and resume normal sleeping patterns after a particularly stressful event.

Prebiotics are carbohydrates that are non-digestible. They stimulate the growth of probiotics. Their key benefit, along with probiotics, is to help your body maintain a healthy digestive system. Prebiotics can be found in the following foods:



- Asparagus
- Oats
- Legumes, such as lentils and chickpeas
- Bananas
- Burdock and chicory root
- Chinese chives
- Honey
- Onions
- Rye
- Maple sugar
- Jerusalem artichokes
- Dandelion greens

According to Agnieszka Mika, MD, lead author of the study, acute stress can disrupt the gut microbiome, which is why the researchers wanted to test if a diet rich in prebiotics would increase beneficial bacteria in addition to protecting gut microbes from stress-induced disruptions.

The researchers say the results of the study can apply to humans even though the study was done on rats. The study's lead author, Robert Thompson, MD, said "the stressor the rats received was the equivalent of a single intense acute stressful event for humans, such as a car accident or the death of a loved one."

Prebiotics are not known to produce any undesirable health effects. Almost everyone needs prebiotics, especially those who don't get enough from their diet. And although it's unclear exactly how much prebiotic fiber the body needs every day, experts agree that four to six grams are ideal.

"Are Prebiotics the Stress Reliever You Never Heard Of?" Lauren Rearick, rd.com, Feb. 20, 2017.

"The Pros of Prebiotics," Veronica Anderson, huffingtonpost.com, July 2, 2015.



Makes 16 (2-tablespoon-size) servings of cashew cream

Base Cream*

- ♦ 2 cups raw cashews
- ♦ 1 tablespoon coconut oil
- ♦ 1/3 cup honey
- ♦ 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ♦ Juice of 1 lemon
- ♦ Pinch of sea salt, to taste
- ♦ Optional toppings: pistachios, chopped dates or fresh fruit

* If you have a nut allergy, you can use cream cheese instead of cashew cream.

Superfood Color Mix-Ins

- ♦ **Beet powder** – dark pink (substitute beet juice)
- ♦ **Pomegranate powder** – light pink (substitute three drops pomegranate juice)
- ♦ **Goji berry powder** – orange
- ♦ **Turmeric powder** – yellow
- ♦ **Matcha powder** – light green
- ♦ **Spirulina powder** – deep green
- ♦ **Blueberry powder** – violet



Special Notes

- ★ These fruits and veggies are only suggestions for the various colors. Choose what works best for you!
- ★ You can either purchase these powders at a health food store, or do it yourself by buying freeze-dried versions to create the powders at home. If you opt to DIY, simply crush a few freeze-dried blueberries in a plastic bag to create the violet powder, for example.

Directions

1. Cover the cashews in water, let them soak for two to three hours (or overnight), then drain well.
2. Combine cashews with all remaining Base Cream ingredients in a food processor; blend until smooth.
3. Divide the cream into as many bowls as you'd like different colors; then mix in the powders to make your colors of choice.
4. Spread on toast (such as sprouted grain) in different color sections (diagonally or horizontally) so you can see each hue. Finally, spread a clean knife over the whole piece of toast to gently swirl the colors together and complete your masterpiece.
5. Enjoy your unicorn toast straightaway!

Cashew cream – calories: 125, protein: 3 g, fat: 9 g, carbohydrates: 11 g