Adaptive Gardening

by Scott McNutt

Limb loss need not prevent those with metaphorical green thumbs from participating in activities they enjoy. Assistive devices and ideas for adapting equipment and environment can allow those with limb loss or limited mobility to garden to their heart’s content.

Adaption Ideas

For those with limited mobility, consider designing accessible plots and using assistive devices. These include:

• Using raised beds (kits range from $7-$900, depending on complexity and materials), trellises, planters, window boxes, or other containers, such as the hanging tomato planter (prices range from $7-$13)
• Keeping nearby a bench or stool or a seat with wheels (many such rolling seats like the tractor scoot or garden seat caddy are available – prices range from $60-$140)
• Using a tool cart to transport tools, seeds, watering cans, etc.
• Fitting hand trowel, fork, hoe and cultivator heads on broom or mop sticks or other similar poles – or purchasing long-handled versions of these implements; add-on handles, sold by many retailers (prices range from $15-$18), can be attached to allow greater leverage
• Getting a long-handled grabber to retrieve clippings and tools ($10-30)
• Using ratcheted pruners and shears with telescoping handles (prices range from $8 to over $150), which don't require as much leverage
• Availing yourself of soaker hoses ($5-30) or spray wands ($15-$40) for watering to minimize bending and lifting.

For upper-extremity limb loss, a few gardening-specific terminal devices are available from Texas Assistive Devices. These include:

• Hand hoe
• Hand cultivator
• Hand spade
• Pruning saw.

Contact the ACA at 888/267-5669 or amputee-coalition.org
All Texas Assistive Device tools and implements, including gardening tools, can be used with either body-powered or myoelectric prostheses. You will need to check with your prosthetist or orthotist regarding availability and pricing of these items.

TRS, which also builds custom sports and recreational terminal devices for upper-extremity amputees, does not list gardening tools among its sports and recreation devices, but invites customers to inquire about custom projects.

If purchasing assistive devices is not an option, the Idaho Center for Assistive Technology (ICAT) offers a series of videotapes on how to construct your own one-armed gardening implements, using low-cost materials like PVC piping. The adaptive tools include:

- Belt & extension assembly
- Pedal hoe
- Garden trencher
- Rake
- Tree trimmer
- Shovel.

ICAT is also developing a gardening wheelchair called the DIY Garden Tractor; a videotape demonstration of the prototype can be viewed on the Web site. Another low-cost wheelchair design is also in the works (shown in photo on page 45). For more intensive agrarian work, the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s National AgrAbility Project and Purdue’s Breaking New Ground Outreach Program offer resources and suggestions for adaptable and assistive farming devices.

**Vendors**

**Active Forever**
activeforever.com

**AgrAbility**
agrability.org
agrability.com

**Breaking New Ground**
cobweb.ecn.purdue.edu/~agenhtml/ABE/Extension/BNG/Outreach Program/outreach

eziMate
ezmate.com

**Gardener’s Supply Company**
gardeners.com

**Hand Helpers**
handhelpers.com

**Idaho Center for Assistive Technology**
idadocat.org/services/custom-adaptive-equipment/one-armed-gardening

**Kmart**
kmart.com

**Life Solutions Plus**
lifesolutionsplus.com

**Life With Ease**
lifewiththease.com/garden.html

**National Public Website on Assistive Technology**
assistivetech.net

**Plow & Hearth**
plowhearth.com

**Raised Garden Beds**
raised-garden-beds.com

**Texas Assistive Devices**
n-abler.org

**TRS**
oandp.com/products/trs

**The Wright Stuff**
wrightstuff.biz

*Photos courtesy of Texas Assistive Devices*