

# Seniors Who Dig Gardening Report Better Quality of Life

By [RICK NAUERT PHD](#) Senior News Editor, March 21, 2011



A new study suggests gardening can add zeal and increase energy levels for older adults.

Researchers from Texas A&M and Texas State Universities surveyed adult gardeners and non-gardeners on their perceptions of personal life satisfaction and levels of physical activity.

According to Aime 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 non-gardeners."

The older adult population (65 and over) 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 non-gardeners 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 and her colleagues explained: "More than 84 percent 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 percent of non-gardeners."

Significant differences between gardeners and non-gardeners 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 percent, whereas 57.3 percent of non-gardeners disagreed with the statement.

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

More than 75 percent 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.

Source: [American Society for Horticultural Science](#)