HEALTH BENEFITS FROM THE GARDEN

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Adapted from “Gardening is Healthy for People of All Ages” by: Maureen Jenkins

I just prepared a supper of fresh summer vegetables: cucumbers, cabbage, onions, squash, green beans, and corn bread. MMM….good! There is nothing better than delicious vegetables from the garden. When most people think about the garden, they think about the delicious fresh fruits and vegetables they will be eating. Those fruits and vegetables are packed with nutrients essential to good health, and the garden also provides many other benefits. Growing a garden can provide your body with a great physical workout. Gardening can also provide quality family time.

Digging in the dirt and planting seeds is just plain fun for little children. They will benefit in so many ways from learning about the planting process, about bugs, developing motor skills, to preparing and eating the fruits and vegetables. Children who help grow fruits and vegetables are more likely to eat them.

What better way to do strength training than working in the garden? The next time you are carrying that watering can or loaded flowerpot, pay attention to how hard your muscles are working. Maintaining muscle mass is an important part of assuring flexibility and balance. Muscles actually burn more calories than fat, so strength training is vital to a weight-loss plan. When you are bone-tired from getting up and down pulling weeds or harvesting produce know that you are also helping strengthen your bones and muscles.

Gardening is also good for boosting your mood. You may go to the garden in a stressed out mood, but after working a little while and picking a few delicious veggies, those stresses just seem to drift away. I was so ecstatic the other day to find my first cucumbers and tomatoes. Mmm….delicious!

If gardening isn’t your cup of tea, you can still improve your health by eating fresh fruits and vegetables from your local farmers’ market or roadside stands. Produce now available includes: blueberries, blackberries, onions, squash, zucchini, potatoes, cabbage, turnip greens, green beans, radishes, and fresh herbs. By the end of this month, peaches will also begin to be available.
Be sure to visit the Robeson County Farmers’ Market this Saturday, June 9 from 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. for their Extravaganza. Farmers will be there with their produce and I will be there with several other Cooperative Extension agents demonstrating healthy recipes. This will be a great opportunity to taste-test grilled veggies, local grilled chicken and several other garden delicacies, as well as dishes made with local eggs.

Here is a healthy green bean recipe to try:

**Lemon Walnut Green Beans from *Cook Smart, Eat Smart***

- 4 cups green beans
- 1/2 cup sliced green onions
- 1/4 cup chopped walnuts
- 3/4 tbsp. crushed, dried rosemary
- 3 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. grated lemon rind

Wash fresh green beans; pat dry. Arrange green beans in a steamer basket over boiling water. Cover and steam for 8 to 12 minutes or until crisp-tender. Plunge beans into cold water to stop the cooking process; drain. Spray non-stick pan with cooking spray. Over medium heat, add green onions and sauté until tender. Add green beans, walnuts, rosemary, and lemon juice. Cook, stirring constantly, until thoroughly heated. Sprinkle with lemon rind. Serves 6.

For other ideas or more information, please contact Janice Fields, Extension Family and Consumer Sciences agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, by E-mail at Janice_Fields@ncsu.edu or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.