

FEATURE II

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Invigorate Your Body, Mind and Soul with a Hobby!

What is a hobby? The dictionary describes a hobby as “an activity or interest pursued for pleasure or relaxation and not as a main occupation.” Synonyms for hobby are: amusement, avocation, distraction.

Experts and doctors alike agree that a hobby improves our quality of life. If we have a hobby and we succeed in the accomplishment, we feel a strong sense of fulfillment, which eventually makes us happier. Further, our life outcomes can be more than just satisfactory. We will have the chance to do two things at a time, i.e., our jobs and our hobbies.

By doing this we get a double satisfaction from life: the material reward of the job and the spiritual, beneficent feeling of the hobby. Another advantage from having a hobby is that we develop the skills connected to it. We use our brain fully. Our hobbies are an ongoing adventure and journey of discovery, something we like and greatly enjoy doing!

The emotional returns are valued more than a financial reward! An activity chosen as a hobby is very dear to one's heart. The individual derives immense satisfaction, from heart, to mind, to soul.

What is the importance of a hobby?

Hobbies help us beat the blues! They give us a chance to get away from our monotonous everyday regimen without leaving town.

Hobbies are brain friendly! When a hobbyist passionately pursues a hobby and enjoys the activity, the brain's septal zone is stimulated. The hobby makes us feel good.

Hobbies kindle creativity! Pursuing an activity in which you have an inherent interest helps unearth hidden talents.

Hobbies improve our concentration and focus! They aid in straight thinking, in staying and keeping more focused. There's less time for wayward thinking.

Hobbies foster self-esteem! We think beyond the boundaries of our work, job, business, etc. Our self worth is more than financial revenues and work performance.

Hobbies foster new friendships!

Hobbies are a stress buster! Engaging in a passionate activity destresses and relaxes our mind.

Hobbies can even save us money, i.e., vegetable gardening.

The benefits of engaging in a hobby are enormous! Why do people avoid the idea of a hobby?

No Time. Between driving to work, work, driving home from work, eating, sleeping and miscellaneous activities there is NO TIME! I say bull...! Find the time. An hour or two a day. Some time on weekends. Once you find a hobby you enjoy, the problem will be “not enough time.”

Too costly/expensive. Find an inexpensive hobby. There are a myriad of activities to choose from. Hobbies can be broken down into six basic types; games/sports, extreme sports, random hobbies, collecting, outdoor recreation, and the arts.

The top ten men's hobbies are mentoring, chess, fantasy sports, rocketry, target shooting, collecting (autographs, sports memorabilia, stamps, coins), homebrewing, billiards, coaching, and fishing. There is a hobby website to visit: www.entsoboringlife.com. It outlines the 50 Most Popular Hobbies. This should provide you with some ideas. Find something you have a passion for. Something you enjoy doing or can't wait to do. Find a hobby that works within your budget.

My hobby is vegetable gardening. I look forward to spring each and every year. I can't wait to get my hands dirty. It's the thought of planting a seed or small plant, nurturing it, caring for it. If I do everything right the benefits will provide me nourishment and bounty throughout the year. There is nothing like homegrown peppers, tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant, cucumbers, onions, garlic. Take it off the vine, onto your plate, into the pan, or your salad. And don't forget your herbs. They provide color,

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aroma, and flavor for both your house and garden. Good starting herbs are basil, chives, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme.

Gardening can be as small as a couple pots on the patio or as large as a section of your yard. I would suggest starting small. You want this to be a hobby, not a job. Determine who you are growing for: family, friends, neighbors, or you own farmstand (I hope not!). Most of the time, you are growing for your family and some of the neighbors. Remember, don't plan for the neighbors, they receive the excess. They might be growing their own vegetables. If the harvest is lean, you will want to keep the produce for yourself.

How do I start? Where do I begin?

Start with the sunniest spot in your yard. Most vegetable plants need a minimum of six hours of daily sunlight. Keep the vegetable plot as far away from trees as possible. Trees not only diminish sunlight, but the roots steal nutrients and water. Additionally, the roots can impede the growth of the vegetable root base. Trees might be good for shade and the birds but they are not vegetable garden friendly.

Soil is the foundation for your vegetable garden. No matter how sunny your garden area is or how much moisture it receives, the soil will determine whether you have a good or bad growing season. Once you have selected an area in your yard, determine the type of soil you have and what needs to be done to make it ideal for growing. Soil shouldn't be too sandy or comprised of clay. The single most important way to improve the soil is by adding organic matter: rotted manure, compost, chopped leaves, etc. Dig deep to aerate the soil. Test your soil for acidity or alkalinity. The soil pH should be in the range of 5.5 to 7.0. Two minerals, lime and sulfur, can raise or lower the soil pH. A good soil building strategy is adding organic matter and mulches year-in and year-out.

OK! A prime location has been found. The soil is black and rich in nutrients. Worms have found a home. The pH levels are acceptable. When is the right time to plant? I typically wait until after Memorial Day (end of May). Typically, after May, we are free of evening and morning frost. You don't want to be forced to cover and uncover your plants. Cool weather vegetables such as peas, potatoes, beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, and celery can be planted in early and mid spring. Late spring and early summer (after the last frost) vegetables are beans, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, gourds, melons, peppers, squash, tomatoes, etc.

I go the small plant route. When the soil is turned over or rototilled, I am ready to plant. Since the season is short and I want to harvest in July, August, and September, I use plants rather than starting from seeds. Plants insure that I have vegetables during this time period (but will add cost). Go to your local greenhouse or gardening store, they should provide a good variety to choose from. To keep cost down, you can always start with seeds inside. Follow directions on the seed package for time to start the seed and to transplant to your garden. You will need sufficient sunlight or fluorescent lighting, water, and about six weeks or so in your house prior to outside planting.

Now the fun begins. Plant your vegetables in whatever manner you choose. This is your vegetable garden. I use mesh towers. This keeps the plants upright, regardless of weather conditions. Additionally, it is easier to remove vegetables and prune the plants, and the garden looks neat and clean. Water sufficiently, but don't over water. The daily weather and rain conditions will identify how long and how much to water.

I love to watch the plants grow and bear fruit. I spend an hour or two a day in the garden, turning over the soil for improved aeration, watering, pruning, plant repairs, and most of all picking vegetables. My wife claims it's a way for me to get out of doing house work!

Maybe she's right. It sure beats being in the house during an enjoyable summer day.

Listed below are some tricks of the trade for the growing season:

- Tips for early spring planting of vegetables – Plant inside old tires. The tires protect the plants from harsh winds and the dark rubber absorbs heat from the sun and warms the surrounding soil.
- Leave room for blossoms – Flowers attract beneficial insects while repelling pests. Use companion planting to repel insects. Herbs and flowers such as basil, tansy, marigolds, mint, dill, and sage.
- Scare off birds with reflective tape.
- Move plants around; they should be in the original spot every three to four years.
- Garlic sets need to be weed free or they will not grow.
- When peppers are blossoming put drops of honey on each plant. This attracts bees, which pollinates the plants and provides for more and larger peppers.
- How to get the "hottest" chiles? Grow in the sunniest spot in the garden and harvest on the hottest days. Hot weather brings out the heat!
- When tomatoes begin showing color, water with sugar! The tomatoes will be sweeter and juicier. But go easy on the water; minimizing the water while the fruit ripens enhances the flavor. Use calcium tablets (Tums) to prevent tomato rot.
- Fold over the onions when the plant begins to seed. The onions will get bigger and tastier.

These are just some helpful hints. There are numerous magazines and vegetable gardening books to assist you.

After the growing season is over in late fall, pull out the dead plants, clean-up the soil, and prepare yourself and your vegetable garden for the upcoming year. Make the upcoming year bigger and better! You will have a year under your belt.

To put it simply, find a hobby or two! It is a great way to recharge your mind and body. I love vegetable gardening, and I look forward to the hours I spend in the garden.

Find your niche, your passion, and go with it! **-OC**

Reference materials:

- www.notsoboringlife.com
- www.targetwoman.com – importance of hobbies
- www.saching.com – the importance of hobbies — start an interesting hobby
- *Reader's Digest* – Gardening Secrets, Pleasantville, NY

