

Rutherford County

FROM THE GROUND UP



January 7, 2025

Yard Work Sweat Counts as Exercise Sweat

The arrival of a new year is kind of a big deal. Being present to welcome a new year means you can add another year of experience to your life resume. While it does mean you're getting older, hopefully the additional year of experience comes with an increase in wisdom. It often doesn't, but it is something to hope for.

We often view the arrival of a new year as an opportunity for a fresh start and that's likely why some resolve to make changes in the new year. A resolution common to many is to increase their level of exercise. That's a worthwhile goal for a great many of us and one strategy to improve our success rate is to recognize and take advantage of the exercise benefits of many common activities we do regularly such as yard and garden chores.



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An internet search of “the exercise benefits of lawn and garden chores” will return a lot of results. One that popped up during my research was the October 1, 2024 *Harvard Heart Letter* from Harvard University. In it Dr. I-Men Lee, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and an expert on the role of physical activity in preventing disease said “Many yard and gardening tasks require enough effort to count as moderate-intensity exercise.” For example, raking, digging, planting, cultivating/weeding, and mowing with a walk behind mower all require 3 or more metabolic equivalents (MET's). An MET is a measure used by exercise researchers to gauge exertion. Activities that use 3 to 5.9 MET's count as moderate-intensity exercise. Some references equate the work done while performing a yard or garden chore into the number of calories burned while performing it. It's interesting to read some of the calorie estimates for many of these chores. For example, a chart found on LIVESTRONG.com shows that a 155-pound person burns an estimated 410 calories per hour mowing with a push type power mower while a 185-pound person will burn an estimated 488 calories per hour. These are estimates and factors such as walking speed, slope, etc. influence the actual values, they do give you a ball park idea calorie expenditure.

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In addition to the physical exercise benefits of yard and garden chores, mental health benefits are attributed to them as well. An article published by Michigan State University Extension on May 19, 2014 about the physical and mental benefits of gardening stated that according to the journal *Biological Psychiatry*, some experts say the fresh air can help prevent Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and result in higher test scores among students. The article also stated that an experiment published in the Journal of Health Psychology compared gardening to reading as a stress-relieving activity; test subjects that gardened experienced a more significant decrease in stress when compared to the subjects that were assigned to read.

If your New Year's resolution includes getting more exercise in 2025, don't overlook the exercise benefits of lawn and garden chores. Spend a bit of time researching potential benefits as well as ways to maximize your yard workout. In addition, a "yard work workout" may allow you to enjoy some quiet "alone time". If showering is delayed several hours after a bout of yard work in hot weather, the length of your alone time may be extended.

As a precaution, talk to your doctor to verify that your present level of health and fitness will allow you to engage in such activities.

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