

HARVESTING YOUR PHYSICAL POTENTIAL

Have you ever noticed how many people of advancing age seem to have an increasingly keen interest in gardening? Could it be that it is the subconscious metaphor of tending a flower garden, the continual promise of new life, the constantly recurring growth of new buds and flora becomes increasingly important to us as we face our own mortality?

One thing is certain; it's not just the finished result that is so appealing. Many gardeners continue work above and beyond maintenance of an already beautiful and blooming garden. Indeed, most continue to seek out new projects to extend their commitment and enterprise. This is in fact because it is the physical side of the task, the weeding, digging and foraging that is so demanding and yet so therapeutic which sees the end result of a garden transformed into a thing of beauty that makes the labour one of love.

How then can we make this appeal of shaping, and trimming blooms and lawns into something we can feel excitement for and pursue with equal zest for our own bodies?

For some there is no doubt this can be a huge transition. Love for inanimate or less important objects are often a symbol to make up for neglect of our own health and bizarrely many of us crave and get satisfaction from something so less important and even dependant on ourselves. Witness people who take far better care of their dogs than themselves. They walk the dog 3 or 4 times daily, throwing a ball for it to engage in more strenuous exercise and then feed it nutritionally fortified dog food containing vitamins and minerals absent in their own diet. Many of these people can barely climb the stairs such is the neglect of their own direct exercise plan.

Patience, persistence, commitment and organisation are all needed for tending a well cared for garden with shortcuts being immediately recognisable. The educated and successful gardener knows this to be true and plans their seasonal planting and grooming with great scrutiny. The same unfortunately cannot be said of most peoples tending to their own physicality.

The instant gratification of short-term happiness or more accurately, changing an emotional state is served with quick choices and short cuts when it comes to most peoples eating habits. Chocolates, sweets, pastries and ice cream don't really satisfy for long and the vicious cycle of putting on weight and eating because of being depressed by the extra weight is soon achieved. Add alcohol to the mix and you quickly see how and why modern day teenagers are sucked into the same void, which is capped for them, with promiscuous sex, hard drugs and suicide. When the instant gratification of junk foods and alcohol do not equal the 'cool' requisite for embracement by their peers, then approval is sought down these dark avenues. Will the current generation of teens make caring, organised and precise gardeners one day? This narrator thinks not.

So having dealt with the dark side of what life has to offer with this analogy we move onto the positive benefits of training our minds along with our bodies into

practicing what will lead to true satisfaction and happiness.

As we have established it is not only the end result, the manicured garden that is important. It is the tending process, which leads to the satisfaction.

Likewise with our own health and physical contentment, only by committing to a regular and disciplined exercise and nutritional routine can we achieve spiritual and intellectual contentment. Every modern philosopher and successful businessman from Anthony Robbins to Bill Gates agrees with something we in the health and fitness industry have been aware of for decades. That is that peak mental health and sharpness is closely related to physical vitality and wellbeing. So how do we begin the road to health? Let's start with our cardio routine.

The important issue here is not just how much jogging or stationary cycling we do but when. The answer is first thing in the morning. From personal experience I can tell you emphatically 15 minutes of light to medium jogging at 6a.m. will yield five times the results of an hour in the evening. Why? Firstly, self discipline satisfaction. It takes tremendous commitment to rise from a warm bed on a frosty winter's day to warm up and exercise cold limbs and muscles. Secondly, a human metabolism is a prime fat burning machine when we first awake from a good nights sleep and we can either light that fire by hitting the bricks or throw cold water over it and snuggle up with a marmalade covered piece of toast!

By contrast, raising your metabolic rate with late evening aerobic workouts leads to disrupted sleep patterns and an even greater inability to get up in the morning!

The third and most important reason for taking your aerobic exercise before most others are out of bed is that it takes care of your physical and spiritual needs before you have to throw yourself into your other daily tasks which for the majority of us are performed for someone else, be they work, house chores, looking after kids and so on. The feeling of satisfaction derived from adhering to this Spartan regime two or three times a week is second to none and indeed

your productivity level in all of these other areas will rise by at least 200%! Statistically we are intellectually sharper early in the morning and this naturally enhanced concentration level is hugely magnified following early morning exercise. Is it tough?

Yes. In the beginning. However the benefits to your working productivity along with improvement in your sleep patterns make this a must for serious fitness enthusiasts. This is the equivalent of planting your early spring bulbs in the absolute start of the peak of gardening season. This attention and forward planning is what sets us up for our big, future physical harvest. The kind that is sweetness and light personified as we walk the beach in an exotic location in possession of our ideal beach buns and a tight tummy. Wait. Can't you have the same feeling of fat loss with some surgical intervention? No. Not only can surgery not tighten and tone muscles it requires no discipline on your part just a few hundred pounds and a couple of days off work. It is the gardening equivalent of calling in the Ground Force crew and expecting to call the end result your baby. It does not deliver that feeling that only comes with achieving ones own goals.

Only by understanding this analogy in its truest form can you reap your own physical harvest.

Your exercise regime must also be holistic. In other words it must fulfil all your of your long term health, fitness and fat burning requirements. Weight training, for maintaining muscle mass and bone density, coupled with a short but regular flexibility and stretching routine are just as important as working your heart and lungs with cardio workouts.

The parallel with gardening then is complete. Like the best gardeners know, it is the complete strategy with planning and preparation that leads to success. Only with the detoxifying effects of an early morning run, (weeding) The weight bearing exercise (planting) and the flexibility routine of stretching or boxercise, (the pruning and trimming), will you thoroughly experience the therapeutic and ritualistic effects of the true Good Life that is tending the human garden.

