



STAYING SAFE IN THE GARDEN THIS SPRING

Spring has sprung. With sunnier skies and warmer weather ahead, many of us might be eager to return to a beloved seasonal hobby: gardening. As exciting as it is to begin planting and growing again, working in the garden can actually present a number of dangers and health concerns. As with most all activities that require physical exertion or time spent outdoors, it's important to take the proper precautions to protect your green thumb for future harvests.

BUT FIRST: Why should you garden in the first place?

Some benefits of gardening include:

- Regular physical activity and burning of calories
- Improved diet through easy access to nutritious ingredients
- Mentally and emotionally healthy time spent in nature
- Stronger bones and immune system through a healthy dose of vitamin D
- Decreased stress levels

Now that we've convinced you to start your own, at-home garden filled with colorful fruits and veggies, here are some quick, healthy tips to get you started on the safest foot possible.

ALWAYS WEAR GLOVES. Choose garden gloves that have a protective rubber coating to protect your skin from insect bites or potential irritants.

DRESS FOR THE SUN AND TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS. When working in direct sunlight, resting in the shade every so often will give your body the chance to recover from the heat and can prevent muscle injury.

CAREFULLY READ LABELS ON GARDENING PROJECTS. Many chemicals you might use in your garden have very specific instructions, and it's important to follow them to avoid harming yourself or others.

WARM-UP. Gardening can affect your body in a very similar way to that of a moderate-intensity workout. It works a number body parts, including the legs, arms, abdomen and back. So, make sure to warm up before doing any digging; you could simply walk around your garden for a few minutes before doing some pre-activity stretches.

REMEMBER SUNSCREEN AND INSECT REPELLENT. The normal springtime precautions apply for any time spent outside, so make sure to apply the appropriate SPF and repellent before you start working.

STAY UP TO DATE ON VACCINATIONS. Working with soil and sharp metal tools can put you at risk for serious diseases such as tetanus. To limit your chance of contracting gardening-related diseases, it's recommended to receive a tetanus/diphtheria (Td) vaccination at least once every 10 years. In general, you should ask your healthcare provider if they recommend any other vaccines to protect you while you engage in gardening and other springtime activities.

Stay safe, and we hope you have fun experimenting in the garden this spring!

"Dig into the benefits of gardening," Mayoclinic.com, July 12, 2022.

"Gardening safety," Betterhealth.vic.gov.au, October 31, 2018.

"Safety Tips for Your Farm and Garden," NCAT.edu, Accessed March 7, 2024.

Crescent Roll Veggie Pizza



Prep Time: 10 minutes, Cook Time: 10 minutes,
Total Time: 20 minutes, Serves: 32 pieces

Ingredients

- 8 ounces reduced-fat cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt
- ½ cup light mayonnaise
- 1 package powdered Ranch dressing mix (1 ounce)
- 2 cans crescent rolls
- 1 cup fresh broccoli, chopped
- 1 cup fresh red pepper, chopped
- 4 green onions, chopped
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese

Instructions

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F.
2. Use an electric mixer to blend the cream cheese, yogurt, mayonnaise and dry Ranch dressing packet in a large bowl until it's smooth and creamy.
3. Roll out the crescent rolls in one big piece onto a large, greased or parchment-paper-lined cookie sheet. Pinch the seams together, if needed. This will form the pizza crust. Bake the crust for 8 to 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Let it cool.
4. Spread the cream cheese mixture onto the cooled crust. Top with cheese and veggies.
5. Use a pizza cutter or large knife to cut into squares. Serve immediately or store in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to four days.

Nutrition Info

Calories per serving: 96, Total fat: 5 g, Saturated fat: 2 g, Sodium: 2710 mg, Total Carbohydrate: 9 g, Dietary fiber: 1 g, Sugar: 2 g, Protein: 3 g

Recipe adapted from: momlovesbaking.com



Cultivate Your Own Round, Pizza-Pie Garden This Season

Yes, it will look like a giant pizza growing in your yard. Spend this summer tending a six-foot-wide, round garden resembling a pizza-pie — that's grand enough to feed a belly-rumbling giant!

Visualize: Planning for your pizza-shaped garden can be a fun way to get excited for the summer season ahead. On paper, have your kids draw a circle and divide it into seven slices, like a pizza pie. Have everyone share their favorite pizza topping, then label each space with those toppings. One slice/wedge is saved for your entrance/pathway, but the other six can be customized. Some options might include: colorful bell peppers, small eggplants (little fingers variety), tomatoes (plum and cherry), zucchini, and herbs like oregano or basil, along with onions and garlic. Experts recommend keeping the herbs, onions and garlic growing together in one slice, on the south side of your pie, just left of the entrance.

When you dig your garden outside, try outlining your pizza-pie, and each slice, with rocks. You might even choose yellow marigolds and calendulas to resemble cheese in your pizza garden. Clip photos from seed catalogs, print images from online or sketch each topping to create an artistic plan of this season's pizza patch to hang on the fridge.

Harvest Party: When it's time to harvest, consider having a DIY pizza party as the much-anticipated grand finale for a summer filled with diligent work! Make homemade pizza-shaped invitations; grab frozen pizza dough at the store (or make your own) and offer a dough ball for each guest to roll out; create pizza animals or faces with your fresh toppings; bake and enjoy! Or use your garden veggies to make the featured recipe this month!

If your family lives for pizza night, this themed garden is an easy, fun way to tap into the wellbeing benefits of planting with your loved ones, which

extend far beyond the dinnerplate. A few unique wellbeing benefits of gardening include:

- Its ability to reduce stress: Science shows the fragrance of nature (think: freshly cut grass or a bouquet of flowers) can promote overall mental wellbeing by helping us feel relaxed and even joyful.
- Its ability to keep us physically strong: Several activities in the garden call on functional movement (think: squats, lifting/carrying, pulling or raking), meaning they work the whole body as one system, which is natural and beneficial for overall wellbeing.
- Its ability to help us breathe deeper: Spending time outdoors encourages deeper breathing, thus moving more oxygen around the body and supporting the health of all organ systems.
- Its ability to help us relax: Being in nature reduces heart rate, lowers blood pressure and eases muscle tension. Studies show bird song is a powerful stress-reducer, even when listening via headphones. It's even more powerful than being in a green space or outdoors in nature.

"Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Activities to Do in the Garden"

"How Gardening Can Improve Your Health," Cleveland Clinic authors, health.clevelandclinic.org, May 2, 2022.

"Dig Into the Benefits of Gardening," Mayo Clinic Health System, mayoclinichealthsystem.org, July 12, 2022.

"Why Birds and Their Songs Are Good for Our Mental Health," Richard Sima, washingtonpost.com, May 18, 2023.