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MEDIA RELEASE

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Watch your back when watering

Most Australians are now familiar with the challenge of keeping their gardens blooming amid warmer weather and tighter restrictions on water use. In a bid to limit our water usage, level 2 water restrictions have been in force in most capital cities since 2003.

With water catchments showing little sign of recovering to pre-2003 levels, it's time to become more water efficient. Local councils may move to level 3 water restrictions later this summer if water storage levels continue to diminish, yet even if greater restrictions don't come into force, now is a good time to reassess your relationship with water and use it more sparingly in the garden.

Affixing hoses to take grey water from bathrooms, kitchens and laundries for re-use in the garden is an ideal solution, but if this can't be managed, using buckets and watering cans is the next best way to water without wasting a drop. The Australian Physiotherapy Association has some timely tips to minimise the risk of injury from lugging litres of water to the garden.

"Older people, in particular, are at greater risk," said Cathy Nall, APA president. "We know that watering the garden in the early morning or in the evening is the preferred time to water, when there is less water loss through evaporation. But older people are more susceptible to falls in the evenings when their vision is reduced, so they should try to water in the early morning when it's cooler and brighter.

"Wrist, shoulder and back pain is also more likely when carrying heavy buckets and watering cans, and lifting awkward loads. Warming up with a few stretches can make a difference, and it's worth stretching a bit more when you're done."

Tips to minimise injury and pain

- When lifting buckets or watering cans, remember to bend your knees, not your back. Never twist your body when your back is bent. When lifting, keep your feet apart and one slightly in front of the other.
- Never overfill your bucket. Only carry as much weight as you know you can lift comfortably. Hint: half-fill buckets to lighten the load and help avoid wrist and shoulder pain.
- Distribute the load equally on each side of the body by using two lighter containers rather than one heavy bucket. Hint: rinse out and use 2-litre milk bottles for watering.
- Always carry buckets as close to your body as possible. Holding any weight away from your body increases the stress on your upper body and back.
- Place the bucket on a stool or chair when filling it, so you don't have to lift it up as far when it's filled.

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Local spokespeople available. All enquiries:

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- Keep the pathway where you are carrying the buckets free from trip hazards and choose the flattest path possible.
- Pay attention to where you place your feet (it helps if you can actually see your feet) to avoid a stumble, and avoid wearing thongs or flip flops.

For expert advice on carrying loads safely, consult your local physiotherapist. The Find a Physio service on the APA website can help you locate a physiotherapist in your area.

General fitness advice for older people, and tips for gardening safely, are also available from the APA website.

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