

garland pose

by marize joubert

malasana



who

I was born on a farm in a small town in South Africa. At the age of eighteen, I felt brave enough to take on the world and so my journey began. I had been searching for yoga for so long and one day I awoke with a sense that I had finally arrived: It had been inside of me all along; all I had to do was peel away the layers of my being and discover the hidden treasure.

But why yoga? The simplest answer I have come up with is that yoga makes you feel good. It's relaxing, energizing and strengthening all at the same time. Yoga enhances your experience of life. It changes your perspective on things and enables you to embrace a larger, more accurate conception of who you are, how life works and what forces exist in the universe. As you practice more regularly, it helps clarify your deepest longings, motivations and aspirations, thereby restoring hope, meaning and purpose to life. I feel blessed to have stumbled upon this incredible tool and want to share it with the world. The most fulfilling part of teaching comes when my students leave feeling at peace and relaxed in their own inherent perfection.

why

Malasana makes the ankles suppler and provides a good stretch to the back of the lower legs, the back and the neck muscles. One aim for squatting is to limber up your hips. It tones the belly muscles, aids in digestion and strengthens your metabolism. It also helps to keep the pelvis and hip joints mobile.

Malasana is an ideal pose for pregnant goddesses. It encourages the baby to drop down into the birthing canal. Squatting used to be a familiar position for our ancestors; they were comfortable having their bodies and upper legs in a 160-degree angle. These days, we are only used to having our lower bodies hinge at a 90-degree angle. By force of sitting on chairs, in beds or in our cars, we are slowly losing the mobility in our hips, sacrum and lower back—all of which creates health problems and injuries.

how

Squat with your feet as close together as you can get them. If you can, keep your heels on the floor. Otherwise, support them with a rolled up blanket. Separate your thighs slightly wider than your torso. Exhaling, lean your torso forward and fit it snugly between your thighs. Relax the fronts of your ankles. Press your elbows against your inner knees, bringing your palms together in prayer, or *anjali mudra* and resist the knees into the elbows. This will help lengthen the torso. Remember to keep your body weight forward. You can also do this pose at the beach or anywhere you find a natural incline. You can start by holding this pose for thirty seconds and then gradually work your way up to five minutes. Inhale, straighten the knees, then stand in *uttanasana*, or standing forward bend.

variations and cautions

People with knee and lower back problems can modify this pose so it can be beneficial and healing for them. If you have knee problems, you can sit on a block. You can also keep your feet parallel and your heels wider than usual, like you would in downward facing dog. Keep your knees in line with your ankles. And even though your heels might lift up, you can put a rolled up blanket underneath them. It should feel good for the sciatica and/or pinched nerve issues when modifying the pose this way.

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