

Lean, Lovely LEGS

Getting stronger, shapelier legs is easier than you might think. Here's how to sculpt gorgeous gams with five targeted moves.

BY PEGGY HALL | PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL BUCETA

For many women, it's the bottom half that causes concern. You might look good – even great – in a tank top, backless dress or fitted jacket, but it's the thick legs that throw your physique off balance. Or you might be on the slender side, but instead of firm, shapely legs, you've got loose, flabby ones. But take heart: with

problems can all result from a poorly conditioned lower body. "The everyday things that you do – walking, picking up groceries, going up a flight of stairs – come from strength in your legs and core," explains personal trainer Garrett Day. "Life just gets easier with strong legs."

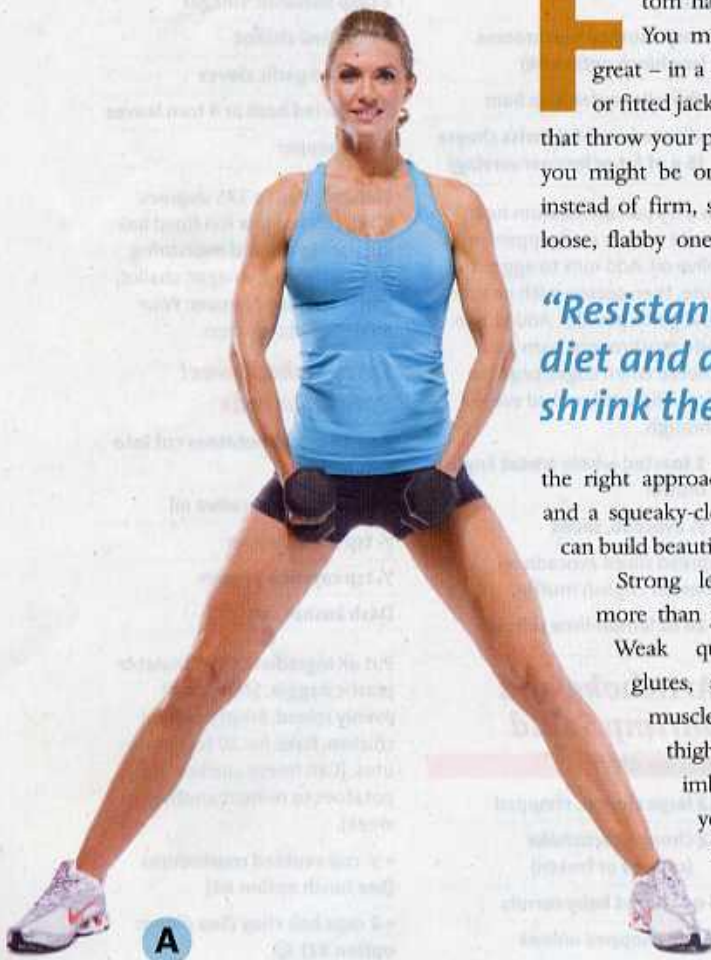
Yet some women purposely avoid training their legs for fear they'll develop

"Resistance training, along with a clean diet and adequate cardio, can actually help shrink the size of your thighs," Day says.

the right approach to strength training and a squeaky-clean nutrition plan, you can build beautiful legs to last a lifetime.

Strong legs are important for more than just a sexy appearance. Weak quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes, adductors (inner thigh muscles) and abductors (outer thigh muscles) can lead to imbalances not only in your shape, but in your body mechanics as well. Lower back pain and knee, ankle and foot

thick, bulky thighs. "Resistance training, along with a clean diet and adequate cardio, can actually help shrink the size of your thighs," Day says. "It's important to train with an eye toward your



MODEL: KRISTINA KOWALIS | HAIR & MAKEUP: LORRI FABRIZIO | STYLIST: RACHEL MATTHEWS | SHORTS & TOP: LULULEMON | SHOES: NIKE

own genetic constitution. If you are an endomorph [large framed, with a tendency to store fat] lighter weights and higher reps will work better for you. Ectomorphs [small boned, do not put on muscle easily] can work with heavier weights and lower reps. Mesomorphs [medium framed, tend to put on muscle easily] can also work with lighter weights, depending on the shape and definition they want to build." Keep in mind that leg muscles are among the largest in the body, so they burn an enormous amount of fuel (read: stored fat) when being trained.

Feel the burn

Shift your weight onto the leg that is bending to really work the glutes. Think about the muscles you work as you lunge.

B

SIDE LUNGE

TARGET MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus and medius

SYNERGIST MUSCLES: adductors

SET UP: Start with your feet together and hold a pair of dumbbells at your sides, palms facing in, or place your hands on your hips.

ACTION: Take a large step to the side with your left foot. Keep your left toes pointing straight ahead and bend your left knee until your thigh is almost parallel to the ground. Keep your right knee straight but not locked. Press firmly through your left foot to straighten your leg and return to the starting position. Complete all reps before switching sides.

The Workout:

Do this workout as a stand-alone leg day once a week, or incorporate two or three of the following exercises into your regular workouts. If the movement is new for you, do the exercise without weights until you get the hang of it. Then use an amount of resistance based on the guidelines on the previous page. You'll feel and see results – tighter, stronger, shapelier legs – in under six weeks.

Exercises

SIDE LUNGE

Sets/Reps: 3 x 12 with 3-5 lb dumbbells or 2 x 20-25 with body weight only

Rest: 45-60 seconds

What you didn't know: Walking side lunges are excellent for getting the heart rate up. Go with a lighter weight since you're stepping to the side. Focus on balance and execution.

STEP-UP

Sets/Reps: 3 x 12 with 3-5 lb dumbbells or 2 x 20 with body weight only

Rest: 45-60 seconds

What you didn't know: The higher the step, the more you hit your glutes. The lower the step, the more you target your quads.

ONE-LEGGED CALF RAISE

Sets/Reps: 3 x 15 with 3-5 lb dumbbell or 2 x 25 with body weight only

Rest: 45-60 seconds

What you didn't know: Most of the weight should be on the big toe portion of the ball of your foot. That will give you the most contraction out of your calf muscle.

PLIÉ SQUAT

Sets/Reps: 3 x 12 with 15-20 lb dumbbell or 2 x 20-30 with body weight only

Rest: 45-60 seconds

What you didn't know: The deeper the plié, the more stretch you'll feel in your adductors. You can go heavier on the weight here, up to 15-20 lb.

STIFF-LEGGED DEADLIFT

Sets/Reps: 3 x 12 with 15-20 lb dumbbells or 2 x 20 with 10-15 lb dumbbells

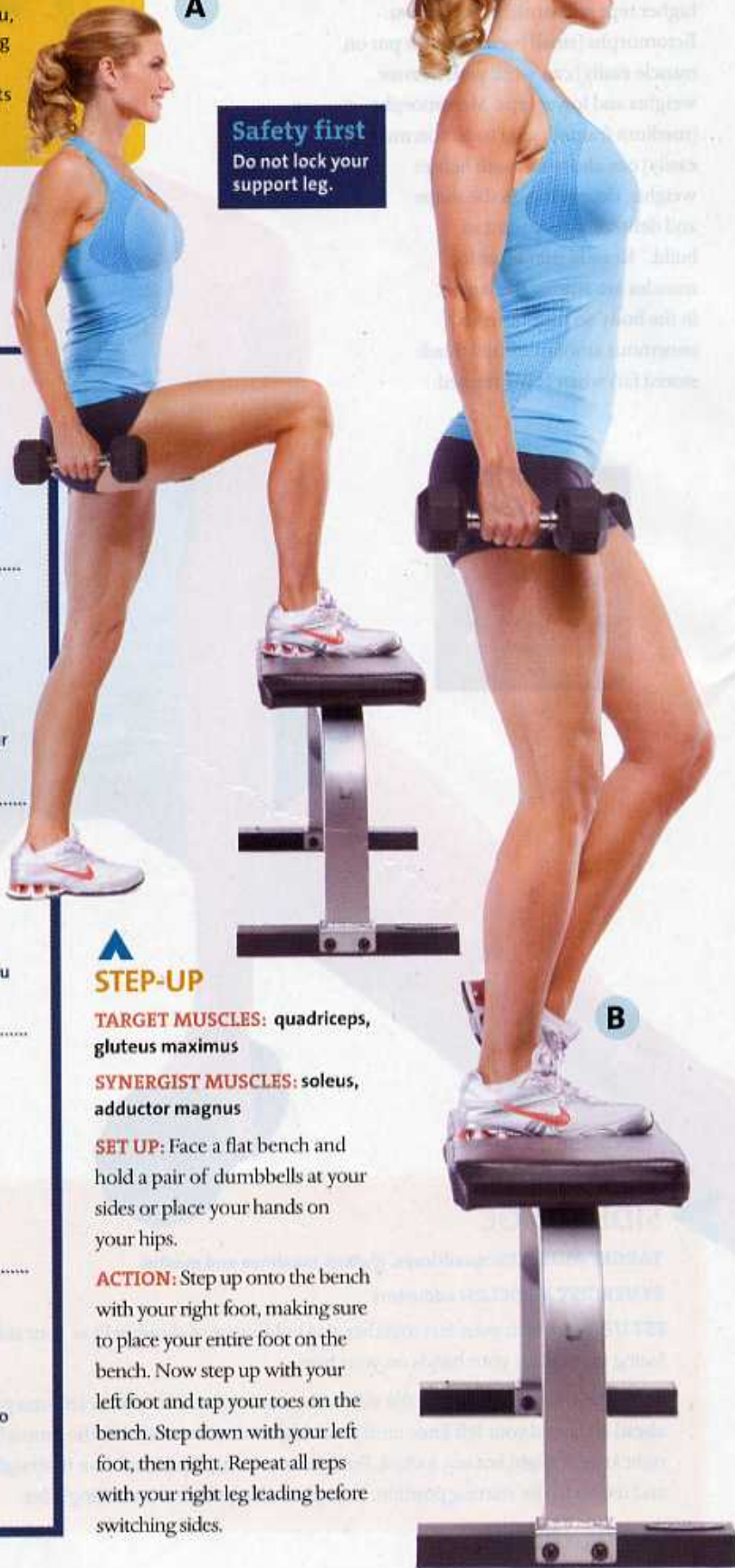
Rest: 45-60 seconds

What you didn't know: Keep the dumbbells to the sides to help keep your spine straight. As your flexibility improves, stand on a platform to elevate your feet and you'll deepen the stretch in your hamstrings.

A

Safety first

Do not lock your support leg.



STEP-UP

TARGET MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus

SYNERGIST MUSCLES: soleus, adductor magnus

SET UP: Face a flat bench and hold a pair of dumbbells at your sides or place your hands on your hips.

ACTION: Step up onto the bench with your right foot, making sure to place your entire foot on the bench. Now step up with your left foot and tap your toes on the bench. Step down with your left foot, then right. Repeat all reps with your right leg leading before switching sides.

B

ONE-LEGGED CALF RAISE ▶

TARGET MUSCLES: gastrocnemius

SYNERGIST MUSCLES: soleus

SET UP: Holding a dumbbell in your right hand, stand with your right foot on a step or bench and rest your left foot on your right ankle. Position your weight onto the ball of your right foot, and place your left hand on a stationary object for balance. "You don't need heavy weight since you're doing singles," Day says.

ACTION: Lower your right heel, getting a stretch in your calf, and then press through the ball of your foot to raise your heel and complete the movement. Take care not to bounce or overstretch.



A



B

◀ Plié SQUAT

TARGET MUSCLES: quadriceps, gluteus maximus

SYNERGIST MUSCLES: hamstrings, soleus

SET UP: Hold one dumbbell with both hands and stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, toes turned out.



A

ACTION: Keeping your shoulders back and your chest lifted, bend your knees until your thighs are almost parallel to the ground. "Don't let the weight take you forward," says Day. "Drop straight down, not on an angle." Push up firmly through your feet and squeeze your glutes to return to the starting position.



B

Maximize the effort

Keep your weight over your big toe.

