



Community Gardening

Grows as a remedy for tough times

If you and your neighbors are looking for ways to help dig out of the recession by lowering your food bills, then history offers a valuable lesson: Look to the earth beneath your feet.

During World War I, community vegetable gardens emerged as a cooperative solution to help the U.S. war effort. These so-called “victory gardens” took root in rural areas, cities and towns. Garden patches were planted in yards, railroad rights of way, city parks and other public lands.

The victory-garden trend resumed full force in World War II. The U.S. Department Agriculture informed the public that if they wanted fresh fruits or vegetables in their kitchens, they should plant victory gardens. Almost instantly, Americans were growing vegetable gardens. By some accounts, victory gardens then produced 40 percent of the nation’s produce.

These days, many point to the economic downturn, a desire to reduce one’s carbon footprint and protect the environment, concerns over food safety and cravings for better-tasting food as the motivations driving folks to work the earth themselves.

Vegetable seed sales grew by double-digits from 2008 to 2009, the nation’s

major seed companies reported. The number of homes growing vegetables was forecast to climb more than 40 percent compared with just two years earlier, according to the National Gardening Association, a nonprofit organization for gardening education.

Community gardens encourage social interaction and self-reliance. They beautify neighborhoods, produce nutritious food, reduce family budgets, conserve resources and offer opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy and education.


Acts of leadership have helped spur a national revival of community gardening. Soon after her spouse’s inauguration, First Lady Michelle Obama planted the first garden at the White House since Eleanor Roosevelt’s victory garden during World War II. Her deed sparked a new wave of interest and earned a commendation of the American Public Gardening Association (www.publicgardens.org).

Earlier in the year, ScottsMiracle-Gro, along with partners including the Garden Writers Association, challenged those who garden to plant an extra row and donate their surplus to local food agencies to feed the hungry. The program—GroGood—also encourages

non-gardeners to start a vegetable garden for food independence while helping those in need in their local communities.

So, just how do you go about actually beginning a community garden?

The American Community Gardening Association provides resources on its Web site, www.communitygarden.org. Click on “Starting a community garden,” and you’ll find an entire step-by-step guide.

The National Garden Bureau recommends wise planning in taking full advantage of a community garden area. For instance, the NGA suggests that wide beds—about 3 feet across—are better than rows because you cut down on the number of paths needed, especially important in small gardens. For more, visit www.ngb.org. 

Photos provided by The Scotts Company.

NORTH CAROLINA RESOURCES

North Carolina State University’s Web site offers multiple resources for community gardens. The site provides a list of existing community gardens, organized by county. Listings often include contact names, phone numbers, email addresses and even Web sites. There’s also a helpful, free how-to guide you can download as a pdf that includes North Carolina resources. Visit <http://nccommunitygarden.ncsu.edu>