

Starting Your Victory Garden - part 1 (September, 2001)
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During the uncertain days of the Second World War many on the home front found solace in the planting and care of their Victory Garden. Rationing of staples was then a necessary part of life. Besides providing fresh fruits and vegetables for the table, average citizens knew their gardening efforts were freeing up vital food stuffs for those on the front. Since fertilizer materials were needed for military production and transport purposes, these gardeners often used intensive growing techniques like green manuring and composting to sustain food production. Victory Gardeners found ways to do their part for the war effort, bolstering their own morale in the process.

Victory Gardens weren't a new idea even then. Many posters of the First World War expressed similar sentiments, encouraging increased farm production to meet wartime needs. One of my favorites, which features Lady Liberty, calls out "Sow the Seeds of Victory, Plant and Raise Your Own Vegetables!"

With the official launching of the Victory Garden Program in 1941, this effort took on a life of its own. Thousands of small to large gardens were planted across the nation by individuals and civic groups. Gardening publications record the enthusiasm of that time, offering seasonal Victory Gardening advice and articles like: "Raise the Flag; red, white and blue flowers that like the brookside"... Humorous cartoons to spark friendly grower competition - one suggesting golf clubs put to better use as tomato stakes! ... Even the ads reflected the patriotic spirit of the times, Burpee seeds for example giving away free seeds of their new "Victory Marigold - 1945 symbol of victory and peace."

Victory Gardens were also important to our British allies, under direct attack and experiencing food shortages. A particular poignant photo pictured a large, well-cared for circular garden. It's caption read "Where the Nazis sowed death, a Londoner and his wife have sown life - giving vegetables in a London bomb crater."

A down to earth summation of Victory Gardening in the World War II era was set down by FF Rockwell, writing in the November 1944 edition of "The Home Garden", "In the Spring of '43 when a serious food shortage actually threatened.... the USDA ... went all out for two heads of cabbage (home-grown) in every pot. The result was a stampede, in many cases amounting to hysteria, to plant not only every suitable garden plot, but even roof-gardens and window boxes with everything from asparagus to zucchini squash."

Continuing on "By the time these lines appear in print the end of the war will be pretty definitely in sight - and the voice of the Victory Garden campaigner will no longer be heard in the land."...Well, perhaps for a little while. Yet I know that the spirit of the Victory Gardener is still within many of us. Although food security is not our concern, surely the widespread planting of fruits, vegetables, and flowers can help lift both our own and our Country's heavy heart.

Now is an excellent time to begin your own Victory Garden! Selecting and preparing the site, boosting fertility, sowing a green manure crop, starting a compost pile with those soon to fall leaves, planting daffodils and tulips for spring. I'm now putting together a packet of information that I think will help you get started with your Victory Garden. Give us a call at 788-4961 and it's in the mail to you.