

Plant a Row for the Hungry – Get Your Hands Dirty to Give Back

By Robin Stanley

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Wow – attendance at our Master Gardener classes is on the way to setting records this year. We are pleased that so many people are interested in learning how to be better gardeners. But we also know that many of you are already very successful gardeners; you're people who grow loads of tasty vegetables (even last year, when many gardeners complained about late and disappointing tomatoes). Does “doing good” for your neighbors while you play in the dirt sound like fun to you? If so, whether you are a novice veggie gardener or think of yourself as a pro, I hope you'll read on to learn more about Plant a Row for the Hungry.

Did you know that right here in our community, food banks, food closets and non-profits are seeing unprecedented requests for food assistance? Plant a Row for the Hungry provides a way for you to support these organizations while doing what you love - gardening. Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR) is an international program that encourages home gardeners to grow and donate extra produce to local food programs. The Garden Writers Association estimates that 14 million pounds of fresh produce have been donated since it began this project in 1995.

Here in El Dorado County, Master Gardeners make it easy for you to donate your extra produce. Since 2007, fellow Master Gardener Zack Dowell and I have maintained the local PAR website (<http://www.par-edc.org/>), providing information we update each spring on a variety of churches and non-profits that are grateful to receive your donations of fruits, vegetables and herbs. On this website, which you can go to directly or access from our El Dorado County Master Gardener website (http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/), you'll find a list of organizations, with hours of operation, contact information and a map, to help you find a program that is convenient for you. We update the list each spring, but we recommend that you contact the organization to confirm the best time to bring your donation. There's also a downloadable flyer that you can post at your office, school or church. You'll be helping us to get the word out!

Who knows what kind of a gardening year we'll have in 2012? Will it be the opposite of last year, with record hot and dry weather replacing 2011's cool and rainy summer? No matter what, I bet that most die-hard gardeners will produce more veggies than they need. In fact, those of you with cool season gardens may be finding that our unseasonably warm winter is producing a bounty of lettuce and broccoli. I don't know a single vegetable gardener who likes to see produce go to waste, so it's good to know that donations are welcome no matter what the season.

We hope you'll start planning now for how and where you can grow some extra veggies. Need a few more resources to get you started? Zack's class on *Spring and Summer Vegetables* is

Saturday, February 25 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Bldg. C - 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville. The Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale will be held on Saturday, April 28 from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the parking lot of the Veterans Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville. It's a great opportunity to purchase veggie starts and lots of other interesting plants for your garden and landscape.

Even if you don't have a garden, did you know that you can help with Plant a Row beds at the Hope Community Garden off Pleasant Valley Road in El Dorado? If you'd like additional information on our local Plant a Row efforts, please contact me at birdwomanca@comcast.net or through the Master Gardener office at 530-621-5512.

Help Master Gardeners win a Rainbird Intelligent Use of Water Award valued at \$5000 by voting online each day. This award of irrigation equipment will be used in the El Dorado County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden under construction at this time. Awards will be made to the projects receiving the highest number of votes by March 15, 2012. Go to www.iuowawards.com and click on "Find and Vote on the Project you want Funded." Search for "UCCE" to locate the El Dorado County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden project. Vote daily to help us win this valuable award.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.