



Plant a Row to Make a Difference

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In February, I happened to be at the Fresno County Master Gardeners Demonstration Garden. Imagine my delight to see the event happening that day. Their Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR) project was sponsoring a drive-thru citrus drop-off. I watched in amazement as car after car pulled up to unload trunk loads of oranges and grapefruits, all to be donated to a local food bank. According to the Master Gardeners on duty, it is an annual event, because there are so many homeowners who have more fruit than they can use.

If you are unfamiliar with the Plant a Row for the Hungry project, it is really quite simple. Here is the short version: It's an international program, started by the Garden Writers Association in 1995, to encourage home gardeners to donate extra fruits and vegetables to needy folks in their community. If you want the long version, check out my 2012 PAR article, which can be found at http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/files/137463.pdf.

Although PAR was originally envisioned as a way in which garden writers could encourage their readers to share extra produce, today many PAR efforts have become part of local partnerships, such as the ones with Master Gardeners in Fresno and here in El Dorado County. Whether you go directly to our local PAR website (www.par-edc.org) or access it from our Master Gardener website, you will find a map and of locations and a list of open hours for food closets and non-profit programs throughout the West Slope. Included on this list is the El Dorado County Food Bank, which is the umbrella agency that provides the majority of food given out locally.

PAR has evolved in other ways too. It started in Alaska, where there aren't a lot of orchards or other perennial crops. Most of the donated produce there actually is planted in rows each year to be harvested before the first snowfall. Here in California, the range of crops that can be grown and donated is much more diverse, from tomatoes, peppers and peaches in the heat of summer, to peas, lettuce and apples during the cooler season. And today, everything is definitely not always planted in rows! Whatever the season, and whatever your gardening style, your donations are welcomed. We annually update our online list of food closets and non-profits needing food and we are planning a major overhaul this year to make the website even easier to use. However, we do encourage you to contact individual agencies for updates on their days and hours of operation before you harvest your bounty to donate.

These days, PAR isn't just a project for home gardeners. It's a great way for families, as well as church, scout, youth and school groups, to volunteer. It's also a great way to get some hands-on gardening experience. But whether you are interested in planting, maintaining, harvesting, or delivering the extra bounty, your help will be appreciated. If you or your group would like more information about our local PAR efforts, or would like to volunteer at one of our local PAR garden plots at the Hope Community Garden, please contact Robin Stanley at birdwomanca@comcast.net or 530-644-1631. So far, we haven't done anything as impressive as the Fresno Master Gardeners, but maybe with your help, we can!

Join Master Gardener Kirsten Rankin at this Saturday's free public education class, Salsa Gardening. If you like hot peppers and south of the border flavors, this is the class for you! Salsa is good for you and the ingredients are so easy to grow. The three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr, Placerville, CA.

Plan on going to the annual Master Gardener Plant Sale on Saturday, May 4th, 2013 in the Veterans Memorial Building parking lot, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be thousands of plants grown by the Master Gardeners available for purchase – tomatoes, vegetables, spring and summer annuals, perennials and more. Cash or checks only, please.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, 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.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.