



Victory Gardens

By Kate Halvorson

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As an Air Force veteran and Master Gardener, Veteran's Day seems like an appropriate time to reflect on the role of Victory Gardens in our nation's history. Over the years, Victory Gardens have promoted food conservation in times of national shortages, heightened patriotism by giving backyard gardeners a sense of national purpose, and encouraged families to learn self-reliance and healthy eating by raising their own fruits and vegetables.

While many associate Victory Gardens with World War II, the concept of government-sponsored home gardening emerged as early as the 1890s. In World War I so-called Liberty Gardens were encouraged by government defense and food conservation departments to address dual national objectives of preventing wartime food shortages and freeing up national logistical train networks to move troops and wartime materials.

The Great Depression and World War II brought greater emphasis on home gardens, and the term "Victory Garden" was born. During the Depression, gardens provided healthy food and in fact became an economic necessity for many hungry families. Extensive government literature depicted 'serving your country' by growing and preparing your own food at home, and contained suggested wartime recipes that conserved meat, butter, and wheat staples.

American leaders wanted to involve every-day Americans in the WWII warfighting effort by encouraging Victory Gardens. The National Food Administrator -- later President -- Herbert Hoover, coined a popular phrase: "Food will win the war!" Home-grown food supported national security objectives by preventing homeland hunger, boosting morale of deployed troops, and helping to feed Europeans impacted by protracted war in their countries. Catchy wartime posters boasted slogans: "Grow Your Own, Can Your Own," "Fruits of Victory," and "Sow the Seeds for Victory." Americans plowed vacant lots, parks, school grounds, and backyards to plant

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Victory Gardens -- many citizens believed having a home garden was a national patriotic duty, and their way to play a role in our nation's wartime mobilization effort. Amazingly, up to one-third of United States fruits and vegetables in 1943 came from Victory Gardens.

Victory Gardens were a beginning to our nation's continued fascination with home gardening. Today, backyard gardeners share the same sense of purpose such as a need to reconnect with our land, grow and make healthy food for our families, and keep our environment green. How fortunate we are in El Dorado County's moderate climate where fruits and veggies can thrive the year around! If you don't have a backyard garden, think about starting one. Pick a sunny spot with six or more hours of sunlight a day, amend your soil with organic compost and make sure your plants have an adequate water supply in the dry months. Protect your garden to keep out hungry deer and other critters... and easy as that, you're on the way to having your very own Victory Garden!

Master Gardeners continue to offer public education classes. November 11 is "Saturday's with Barry" at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden in Placerville, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. "Gardening in the Foothills" will be November 18 at the Government Center Hearing Room, Bldg C in Placerville, 9:00 a.m. – noon. These classes are free.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 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 UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener-e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.