



## Victory Gardens Make A Comeback

by Master Gardener Bunny Williams

The name comes from the gardens that were planted across the United States during World Wars I and II. Back in 1917, during World War I, the National War Garden Commission promoted home gardening in order to free up crops to feed soldiers who were fighting overseas. They inspired students – calling them “soldiers of the soil” – to do their part in the war and help plant Liberty Gardens. When it started to look like



Bunny Williams Master Gardener Photo

**Bunny Williams** tomato garden harvest.

the US and its allies would win the war, the name of the gardens was changed to Victory Gardens.

Preparing for World War II, President Roosevelt started moving the major manufacturers to convert industrial plants

### Introduction of Rationing

With the introduction of food rationing in the United States in the spring of 1942, Americans had a greater incentive to grow their own fruits and vegetables, and even First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt planted a Victory Garden on the White House lawn in 1943.

Roughly one half of all American families had a victory garden during World War II. There were at least 20 million victory gardens covering more than 20 million acres of American soil by 1943. By 1944, 40% of the nation's produce was supplied by victory gardens

### Citizens Use Idle Land

Citizens were urged to utilize all idle land – including school grounds, parks, backyards, and any other vacant lot. There are pictures on the internet of whole families working in

for the machinery of war. He made the leaders of industry realize there would be a lot of money to be made and many eagerly began the process.

Once we entered the war, the Victory Programs urged Americans to conserve the raw materials needed for the war effort, such as cans, fuel, rubber, glass jars, and wax paper. Eventually rationing began and those on the home front had to be resourceful. The men and women of the armed forces had to be first in priority for food.



Master Gardener Photo

**War Gardens** poster courtesy of the National Garden Bureau.

morale, promoted healthy habits, kept citizens engaged in the war effort - allowing them to express patriotism, safeguarded against food shortages on the home front and eased the burden on the commercial farmers working arduously to feed troops and civilians overseas.

There were many inspiring phrases:

“Sowing Seeds of Victory!”, “Food will win the War!”, “Food is Ammunition---Don’t waste it!”

Initially, Secretary of Agriculture, Claude Wickard, saw no value in home gardens. He felt that farmers planting a few extra rows would be sufficient. In 1942, the mayors of both New York and Chicago pressed for the establishment of home gardens. From there the idea blossomed.

The home gardens served other purposes as well. They boosted

their garden. Even little strips of land between the sidewalk and curb were planted. By the time the war ended in 1945, American families had grown approximately 8 million tons of food.

### Victory Gardens Stop

Why did victory gardens stop? After the war ended in 1945, victory gardens began to disappear. Grocery stores and commercial food began to become more widely available so most Americans didn’t see the need to grow anymore. Gardening became a hobby rather than a necessity for most people.

### Author



Master Gardener Ana Dittel

## Fast forward to today.

Springtime 2020, a time that many of us will never forget. Our nation is battling a global pandemic, and most Americans are being directed to shelter at home to help slow the spread of the virus. People are searching for ways to stay occupied, care for their families and themselves, and do their part to help our country get through the crisis. The good news: There's a time-honored way to do all those things, and during World War II it was a vital lifeline for people everywhere: Plant a Victory Garden!

Call it what you will – victory garden, liberty garden, kitchen garden, or backyard garden. This little plot of land is yours! And you can grow whatever you want. Having your own garden gives you an opportunity to be empowered and a little more self-reliant. There are no middlemen. You don't have to wait for transportation trucks. There's no dependency on a system that you have no control over. And there are so many physical and mental health benefits reaped from growing your own locally grown, fresh, organic, non-GMO foods. Times have changed, but if you have a backyard, a patio, or even a windowsill, you can start your own victory garden today.

---

## Delaware Cooperative Extension



Cooperative Extension Education in Agriculture, 4-H and Home Economics, Delaware State University, University of Delaware and United States Department of Agriculture cooperating, Dr. Cherese Winstead, Dean and Administrator. It is the policy of Delaware Cooperative Extension that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, disability, age, or national origin.

---

## Questions

---

For questions on this subject or any gardening topic call the Master Gardener Helpline: In New Castle County, (302) 831-8862; in Kent County, (302) 730-4000; and in Sussex County, (302) 856-2585 x 535. The Master Gardeners monitor the Helpline in the winter but it may take a few days to get back to you.



For more information about Master Gardener workshops, garden helplines, presentations, becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer, or other activities, please visit these websites.

UD Website - <https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/cooperative-extension/environmental-stewardship/master-gardeners/>

DSU Website- <https://cast.desu.edu/cooperative-extension/agriculture-natural-resources/delaware-master-gardeners>