

Victory Gardens ^[1]

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During the war, canned goods were [rationed](#) ^[2], and labor shortages and gasoline rationing made it hard to harvest fruits and vegetables and get them to market. During the Depression, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state agricultural extension agencies had promoted gardening and canning as a way for people out of work to feed themselves. Now, the government stepped up those efforts, asking citizens to grow "Victory Gardens."



^[3] The USDA had promoted "farm gardens" during the Depression. When the U.S. entered the war, the government pitched gardening to urbanites, as well.

Extension agents developed programs to provide seed, fertilizer, and simple gardening tools for victory gardeners. Instructional booklets showed people how to grow and preserve their own food step by step. In 1942, the program's first year, about 15 million families planted victory gardens -- in backyards, in empty lots, and even on city rooftops. In 1943, 20 million victory gardens produced more than 40 percent of the fresh vegetables grown that year in the U.S. And to preserve the harvest, in 1943, Americans bought 315,000 pressure cookers for canning -- up from only 66,000 the previous year.

Teaching Americans to garden

Plenty of Americans still lived on farms in 1942, or had grown up on farms. But residents of cities and suburbs wanted to do their part for victory, too -- or at least have enough vegetables for their families. Government agencies and private companies quickly developed ways to teach all these first-time gardeners.



^[4] This [U.S. Department of Agriculture film](#) ^[4] was produced to show Americans what it took to grow a successful victory garden -- and to convince them that it was worth the effort.

REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT "DO'S"!

DO prepare your soil! YOU can't live without food—neither can a plant! You need air—so does a plant! (right down to its roots). So break that soil up. Make it rich with humus and fertilizer!



DO cultivate your garden! When you were young and tender you had a mother's care. If you want your plants to grow up and be nice to you, shower them with loving care (and cultivation).



DO use water! You won't be able to hear your plants when they're crying for water—but they'll be dying just the same! A good soaking rain, or get out the hose!



DO make a compost heap! It's nature's gift to gardeners and a lazy man's joy! It saves you the work of burning up or carting out waste material. And how the plants love it!



DO plan your garden on paper before you start! It will save you money, time and lots of work. It will keep you from making many mistakes. You are going to have a big family of vegetables this summer—better plan for them now!



DO have a garden this summer! No vegetable ever tasted so good as one you raised yourself! Make your contribution towards helping to win the war! Get the biggest bargains in vegetables, health and new happiness—all practically for the sweat on your brow and the soil on your hands!



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REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT "DON'T'S"!

DON'T think gardening is mysterious or difficult. It does take planning—it does take work—lot less than you may think it does. With a little luck and a little rain there is very little hard left to do after you have prepared the soil at your seeds in!



DON'T kill yourself! That sounds silly after saying that gardening isn't difficult. It does take a certain amount of time. If you plan too much and do not have the time to take care of it—that's silly!



DON'T fail to plan succession crops regarding the size of your garden! If you put everything all at once you will have weeks when you have more than you can use and other weeks when you have nothing! Be Scotch—get two or three out of every row!



DON'T cheat! When you are turning over the soil this Spring, don't push your spade in half a quarter of the way—push it in all the way so the crops need broken up soil. Carrots, parsnips won't half try if you don't make it easy for roots to spread downward.



DON'T think you know more than the man who grew your seeds! You will find directions on the back of every packet of seeds. Read them carefully and follow them faithfully! No "expert" directions for planting the hundreds of varieties available. The man who grows 'em knows!



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^[5] This book, designed to be sold where seeds and tools were sold, took a light approach to teaching first-time gardeners.

From Life magazine

Popular magazines ran articles about victory gardens and published instructions for first-time gardeners. By the end of the war, the victory garden was so much a part of popular culture that it even appeared in advertisements.

- [Gardens for U.S. at War: Six million amateurs work the soil](#)^[6] (March 30, 1942, pp. 81–84) - Introduces the idea of "victory gardens" and gives tips for first-time gardeners.
- [Victory gardens: They are springing up in strange nooks and crannies all over U.S.](#)^[7] (May 3, 1943, p. 29) - Article notes 18 million gardens planted in 1943 and includes photographs of some of the more surprising places converted to garden space.
- [\[Sanka advertisement\]](#)^[8] (June 25, 1945, p. 40) - In this ad, a woman's "wartime conscience" introduces her to decaffeinated coffee, suggesting that by cutting back on caffeine and getting more sleep, she could put more attention into her victory garden.

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