

The Victory Garden

A self-guided module with essential resources

James Lake

Contents

- [How the module is organized](#)
- [Origins and historical significance of the victory garden](#)
- [A step-to-step guide to starting your victory garden](#)
- [Resources to help you get started](#)
 - [Articles](#)
 - [Books for beginning gardeners](#)
 - [Books for more experienced gardeners](#)
- [Resources on the Web](#)
 - [Recursos en español](#)
 - [Resources in English](#)
 - [UCCE recorded lectures and video tutorials](#)
 - [Other video tutorials](#)
 - [Other resources](#)
- [Books and videos of historical interest](#)



How the module is organized

This module is available in Spanish. Haga clic [aquí](#) para encontrar la versión en español de todo este módulo.

This module assumes no previous knowledge or experience gardening however even advanced gardeners will find many practical pearls, helpful books and valuable on-line resources in the following pages. In developing the module my premise was that millions of people in North America and globally share an abiding love of the simple pleasures and challenges of growing plants both to provide a source of food and to bring beauty into their daily lives. Gardening nourishes the body and pursuing gardening as a daily ‘practice’ enhances psychological well-being regardless of how difficult one’s circumstances are. During hard times that many are facing in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, gardening can benefit communities by contributing to the local food supply and strengthening bonds between neighbors.

After reviewing the history of victory gardens, I provide a step-by-step strategy for planning, starting and maintaining your own victory garden. The module includes an extensive list of resources including books, articles, and links to organizations, video tutorials and blogs where you can find practical information on all aspects of gardening. I’ve emphasized resources developed by the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) program which adhere to the highest standards of scientific horticulture. The UC Master Gardener program is an educational and public service component established by UCCE to provide research-based knowledge and information on horticulture, pest management, and sustainable landscape practices to home gardeners of California. In addition to UCCE resources I’ve included links to other reputable resources on essential gardening topics. Although the module is intended primarily for California gardeners, people living in other states will also find useful resources and tips in the following pages.

Origins and historical significance of the victory garden

Through innovation, hard work, and well-coordinated social movements, the U.S. and other countries have survived many crises similar in magnitude to the health and economic impacts of the Covid19 pandemic. One of the most significant initiatives of the 20th century was a broad-based movement aimed at self-sufficiency in food production at the level of the individual and the community. First implemented over 100 years ago, the ‘victory garden’ transformed the way millions of people thought about food and may have made a crucial difference in the outcomes of both world wars. The idea of a ‘victory garden’ originated in the context of severe food shortages in Europe during World War I when large numbers of farmers became soldiers and farmlands became battlegrounds. In response to these dire circumstances, in Spring, 1917, the U.S. government established the National War Garden Commission with the goal of encouraging Americans to use any and all available land to grow vegetables and fruits for export to the allied forces and the citizens of war-torn Europe. American citizens learned essential gardening techniques by reading government-issued pamphlets explaining how to start and maintain a



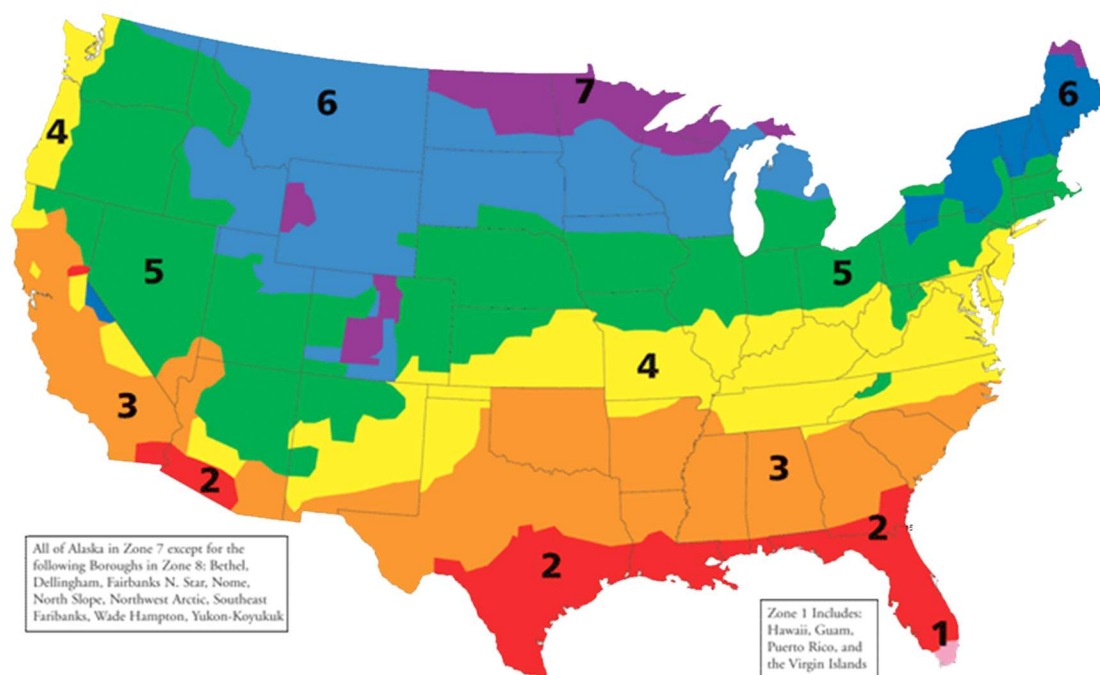
garden, what vegetables to plant, and how to control pests. In parallel with this program the Department of Education created a program aimed at encouraging children to ‘enlist’ as ‘soldiers of the soil.’

After World War I, many people continued to grow their own food and gardening became a popular national pastime. Victory gardens became widespread again soon after the U.S. entered World War II. In spring, 1942, most commercially produced food was diverted to troops overseas and rationing was instituted in the U.S. The result was that millions of Americans had to rely on growing their own food. Government-issued pamphlets were provided to guide citizens in maximizing the productivity of their garden plots while minimizing food waste. Americans were encouraged to document germination rates of different seeds as well as losses due to insect pests and plant diseases. During both World Wars the Victory Garden campaign was widely hailed as an effective strategy for preventing food shortages and boosting morale. In 1944 it is estimated that 20 million victory gardens produced 8 million tons of food accounting for almost one half of all fruit and vegetables consumed that year in the U.S. Below, I’ve included a list of videos and books for those interested in learning more about the history of victory gardens.

A step-by-step guide to starting your victory garden

The first step in setting up your victory garden is to know the hardiness *zone* where you live. The hardiness zone is a geographically-defined zone in which a specific category of plant life is capable of growing, as defined by temperature hardiness, or ability to withstand the minimum temperatures of the zone. Click [here](#) to find your zone.





Once you know your zone, the next step is to put together a list of the vegetables your family enjoy eating, determine how much time will be needed to harvest (i.e., ‘days to harvest’ after planting), and estimate how much produce you or your family can consume during key harvest times. At this early planning stage, it is important to determine how much food you are able to store in a freezer or in dried form. Several resources can help you identify varieties that will probably be most successful in your particular zone. All-America Selections (AAS) is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to promote new garden varieties with superior garden performance based on impartial trials in North America. AAS provides a [free online tool](#) you can use to identify vegetables (and flowers) highly rated for ease of cultivation in your zone.





Now that you've decided which vegetables to grow in your garden, the next step is to decide which ones you will grow from seeds and which ones to purchase as starts at a local nursery. An important consideration here has to do with how long it takes different vegetables to grow before they are ready to harvest. All seed packets mention 'days to harvest' on the back. Because some varieties have long growing seasons it may be necessary to start growing them inside depending on the date of the last frost in your zone. By the same token, if you live in a zone where there is a short growing season due to early frosts it makes sense to purchase plants at a nursery that can be transplanted directly into your garden.





If you are planning a year-round garden you will need to think about which vegetables to plant in spring, what crops to replace them with in the summer months, and again in the fall. These considerations have to do with the best times of year to grow different vegetables. For example, long warm days of summer work best for tomatoes, beans, squashes and cucumbers, while lettuces and most 'root vegetables' such as beets, parsnips and turnips grow best during the cooler seasons.

Now that you know which vegetables you will grow and when to grow them, the next step involves planning the location and physical layout of your garden. These choices have to do with the amount and quality of soil available for cultivating, differences in sunlight in different parts of the property you have in mind for establishing a garden, wind and other factors that may affect plant health, irrigation needs and local pests. While some gardeners prefer to cultivate vegetables directly in the ground, others prefer raised beds or containers.





Before planting seeds or transplants in your garden it is important to find out about the quality of the soil in your yard (i.e., if you are planting your garden directly in the soil), or to know how to select quality soil for your garden.





When planting seeds, it is important to follow guidelines for planting different vegetables in your zone and to put plants in the ground after the last spring frost date for your hardiness zone. The timing of the last frost varies greatly across zones and is related to elevation and conditions affecting local climate. If this information is not on the seed packet you can find an estimate of the expected last frost date for your zone and location on the [plant hardiness zone map](#), a free online resource provided by the US Department of Agriculture. Keep in mind that estimates of the last frost date for your zone are based on averages of historical temperatures and the actual date of the last frost can vary significantly from year to year.

When planting pre-germinated starter vegetables, you have the option of purchasing them at a local nursery or from an online supplier. Deciding whether to plant seeds or pre-germinated vegetables depends on the vegetable you are planning to grow, the time of year, and other factors such as soil conditions, irrigation needs and sunlight. Use the [planning tools](#) mentioned above to decide which approach is the best choice for a particular vegetable.





As you start your garden, think about starting a compost pile. Composting is an important part of organic gardening.





Planting pollinator-friendly flowers can provide an important boost to your vegetable garden by attracting a variety of insects that will ensure that your vegetables are pollinated. All American Selections (AAS) puts out information on ["pollinator friendly flowers"](#) you can select from to optimize pollination of your vegetable garden.





Now that you've set up your victory garden it's important to learn about maintaining it to ensure success in getting the vegetables you've planted to harvest in good condition. As you make progress with your victory garden, you will benefit from resources on a range of practical issues and problems such as best practices for irrigation, fertilizing, safe pest management and others. The following resource list includes articles, books, and links to valuable resources to help you get started with your victory garden, whether you are new to gardening or a more experienced gardener interested going deeper.

Resources to help you get started

Articles

[“Vegetable Garden Basics”](#) published by U.C. Agriculture and Natural Resources, is a concise 4-page introduction to essential aspects of gardening.

[“How do I practice sustainable gardening \(introduction\)?”](#) published by the U.C. Agriculture and Natural Resources, is a concise 4-page article on basic concepts involved in sustainable gardening.



[“Growing a modern victory garden,”](#) published by the Cornell Cooperative Extension program, a concise overview of what you need to know to plan and maintain a victory garden.

Books for beginning gardeners

Raised bed gardening for beginners, Tammy Wylie, Rockridge Press, 2019

The vegetable gardener’s bible: 2nd Edition: Discover Ed’s High-Yield W-O-R-D System for All North American Gardening Regions: Wide Rows, Organic Methods, Raised Beds, Deep Soil, Storey Publishing, LLC, 2009.

Rodale’s basic organic gardening: a beginner’s guide to starting a healthy garden, Rodale Books, 2014.

The organic gardener’s handbook of natural disease and pest control: A complete guide to maintaining a healthy garden and yard the earth-friendly way, Rodale Books, 2010.

Rodale’s vegetable garden problem solver: The best and latest advice for beating pests, diseases, and weeds and staying a step ahead of trouble in the garden, Rodale Books, 2007.

The New Seed Starter’s Handbook, Nancy Bubel, Rodale Books, 2018

Books for experienced gardeners

Resilient Gardening: food production and self-reliance in uncertain times, Carol Deppe, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010.

How to grow more vegetables (and fruits, nuts, berries, grains, and other crops) on less land with less water than you can imagine, John Jeavons, Ten Speed Press, (revised) 2017

Gardening When It Counts: growing food in hard times, Steve Solomon, New Society Publishers, 2006.

The Intelligent Gardener: growing nutrient dense foods, Steve Solomon, New Society Publishers, 2012.

Independence Days: A guide to sustainable food storage and preservation, Sharon Astyk, New Society Publishers, 2009.



Mini-farming: Self-sufficiency on ¼ acre, Brett Markham, Skyhorse, 2010.

The backyard homestead: produce all; the food you need on just a quarter acre!, Carleen Madigan, Storey Publishing, 2009.

The backyard homestead seasonal planner: what to do and when to do it in the garden, orchard, barn, pasture & equipment shed, Ann Larkin Hansen, Storey Publishing, 2017.

Golden Gate Gardening, 3rd Edition: The Complete Guide to Year-Round Food Gardening in the San Francisco Bay Area & Coastal California, Pamela Peirce, Sasquatch Books, 2010.

Resources on the Web

University of California on-line resources

Recursos en español

Haga clic [aquí](#) para ir a un sitio web creado por el Departamento de Agricultura y Recursos Naturales de la Universidad de California que incluye enlaces a 50 publicaciones revisadas por pares sobre una variedad de temas importantes de jardinería. La mayoría de los informes están disponibles como descargas gratuitas.

Resources in English

[The official U.C.C.E. Master Gardener website on gardening resources](#) is a comprehensive on-line resource for the serious gardener. The website is divided into the following sections:

- [The California Garden Web](#) provides summaries of important aspects of gardening including planning your garden, identifying the best location for your garden, starting and maintaining your garden, raised beds, watering, and advice on composting, fertilizing, weeding, sustainable gardening, and safe pest management practices. The site also includes links to authoritative guidelines on growing a variety of vegetables, and advice on harvesting and storing the vegetables you grow. While some sections of 'The California Garden Web' pertain to gardening in California only, most sections contain valuable practical information on the basics of gardening that you can use regardless of your zone.
- [The California backyard orchard](#) includes links to resources that will guide you in planning and developing an orchard in your back yard.
- [Integrated pest management](#) includes links to resources that will help you solve pest problems while minimizing risks to people and the environment.



- [The agriculture and natural resources catalog](#) lists books and reports published by the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The site includes ‘[Master Gardener Tip Sheets](#)’ on a range of important topics. Most articles are available as free down-loads.
- [Arboretum all-stars](#) provides information on 100 tough, reliable plants identified by the horticultural staff of the U.C. Davis Arboretum that are easy to grow, require little water, have few problems with pests or diseases, and have outstanding qualities in the garden. Many of plants listed are California natives that support native birds and insects and most can be successfully planted and grown throughout California
- [Find a UC master gardener program](#) All counties in California have dedicated Master Gardener programs that offer Master Gardener training classes and community education on gardening. An important service of all Master Gardener programs is the HOTLINE, where you can submit a question to a Master Gardener volunteer and access the Master Gardener knowledge base (including all of the above resources).

UCCE blogs on gardening

[‘The backyard gardener’](#) is a blog created by University of California master gardeners in Inyo and Mono counties and includes posts on a variety of topics including gardening in general, vegetables, landscaping and flowers.

[‘The real dirt blog’](#) was created by University of California master gardeners in Butte County, CA and covers a variety of topics on gardening including gardening during drought and how to start a fall garden.

Video tutorials and recorded lectures

Video tutorials produced by University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE)

[UC Master Gardeners videos](#): Tutorial videos developed for U.C. Master gardener trainees. Topics covered include home vegetable gardening, irrigation, the home orchard, the home vineyard, planning a low-water landscape, tutorials on integrated pest management and others.

Home vegetable gardening, two 1-hour lectures recorded in 2002 by Robert Norris, Associate Professor and Associate Botanist at UC Davis. Home vegetable gardening [part I](#) topics include tools needed, recommended reading, ground preparation, planting dates, selection of varieties, and seed planting depths. Home vegetable gardening [part II](#) topics include controlling bird pests, irrigation practices, and transplanting.



[Integrated Pest Management video library](#), an extensive collection of short tutorial videos on a range of pests commonly found in California. The site includes sections on insect pest and weed management, and safe appropriate uses of pesticides.

[Irrigation and water management](#): 1 hr 28 mins; tutorial recorded in 2003 by Terry Prichard, UC Cooperative Extension Water Management Specialist. Topics include plant water use, irrigation systems and the components of a good drip irrigation system

[Video tutorials and recorded lectures from the UC Master Gardeners of Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties website](#): Topics include general gardening tips, pruning, composting, weeding, mulching, using fertilizers.

Other resources

[The National Garden Bureau \(NGB\)](#) is a non-profit membership-based organization founded in 1920 “to educate, inspire and motivate people to increase the use of plants in homes, gardens and workplaces by being the marketing arm of the gardening industry.” In 2020 the organization added a section to its website for individuals interested in learning how to start and maintain a victory garden. With permission from NGB, below I’ve included highlights of essential steps in establishing your own victory garden as described in the *Victory Garden Manual*, first published in 1943.

Resources on the history of victory gardens

Books

“*Sowing the Seeds of Victory: American Gardening Programs of World War I*,” 2014, by Rose Hayden-Smith, an avid gardener and historian, documents the history of the Victory Garden movement from its roots in World War I continuing through World War II.

“*The Wartime Garden: Digging for Victory*,” 2015, by Brown & Way, is an illustrated account of efforts undertaken in wartime Great Britain to establish victory gardens.

“[Victory Garden Leader’s Handbook](#)” reprint of a 20-page pamphlet originally published in 1943 by the U.S. Dept of Agriculture in World War II.

“*Plants go to War: A Botanical History of World War II*,” by Judith Sumner. The book examines military history from the perspective of plant science and includes sections on victory gardens, plant-derived drugs, timber, rubber, and fibers.

Videos



[‘The gardens of victory’](#) 1942, archival film produced during World War II to inspire Americans to grow gardens as part of their patriotic duty to the war effort

[‘The original victory garden’](#) 1942, archival film produced by the U.S. Dept of Agriculture during World War II to educate American families on the basics of planning victory gardens

[‘Wartime farm Christmas special 1944’](#) a documentary of a couple who reenacted efforts made in rural England to grow vegetables to provide food for Londoners impacted by the German bombing raids of World War II

‘Crocket’s Victory Garden’ was produced out of WGBH, Boston starting in 1975. In 1979 the show was renamed to ‘The Victory Garden’ and continued until 1991. The show resumed in 2013 under the name “Victory Garden's Edible Feast,” and continued for 2 more seasons. The series included interviews with farmers in different countries and in many states, and covered all aspects of food production including composting, gardening, fruit trees cultivation, fermentation, and dairy production. All together 76 episodes were produced. You can find a short introduction to the series [here](#). Episodes of the original ‘Crocket’s Victory Garden’ are not available on the internet, however, all episodes of ‘Victory Garden’s Edible Feast’ are available [here](#).

