

Victory Gardens

April 30, 2010

By Valerie Rose



New program helps generous gardeners share the bounty.

Are you planting a Victory Garden this year? Do you remember a Victory Garden from the 1930s or 1940s? Perhaps your grandparents told you about the extra rows of vegetables they planted and canned in those tumultuous decades.

You'll soon be seeing colorful Victory Garden signs in Skagit County, thanks to Americorp Volunteer Mary Evitt. She remembers Victory Gardens as a young child in her native England. Reviving Victory Gardens in Skagit County is now her role as a Program Developer at Skagit County Community Action Agency, with the Foodbank Distribution Center project.

She's inspiring gardeners to grow extra produce to share with our many neighbors who have little access to fresh, healthy food. But Evitt says it's more than growing extra rows of carrots and beets. "We provide a centralized, coordinated effort to get food from the home grower to food banks where it's needed." This year gardeners can call Evitt to find the foodbank that is both nearby and open so that gardeners can drop off their bounty. Evitt says this is especially important for donations to foodbanks that are only open one afternoon a week or have other restrictions on accepting fresh produce. Gardeners won't have to drive around the county searching for a foodbank that's open and prepared to store their produce – the gifts will be directed exactly to where they can be used.

Skagit County has 13 foodbanks, helping to feed one out of every four low-income Skagitonians. Much of the food traditionally available is processed and heavy on starches and fats, often lacking the fresh fruits and vegetables essential for healthy meals. "This new program will increase the variety of foods available in our foodbanks," notes Evitt. "We have the potential of bringing thousands of pounds of fresh, locally grown produce to people in our community who go hungry every day." The produce will also be distributed to free meal services offered at Friendship House, Open Door Community Kitchen, Peer Connection Center, Reverie BBQ, The Well and The Brick. Fresh fruits and vegetables will help make these programs offer healthier meals.

Two additional benefits: eating more fresh produce helps counter the epidemic of obesity, and locally-grown food doesn't require the fossil fuels used in transporting food grown in other states or countries. Evitt says the project welcomes all types of produce. Gardeners can also help by planting extra rows in fall and winter gardens (i.e., kale, spinach, chard, beets, carrots, and cabbage) to share with foodbanks beyond summer's bounty.

"The resurgence of interest in gardening in America is wonderful to witness," Evitt says. "People are growing their own food to save money, to improve nutrition and for food security in an unstable era. And some are sharing their garden's bounty through Victory Gardens. War-torn England's Victory Gardens movement was motivated by similar reasons."

Evitt remembers the Victory Gardens that helped feed Britons during WWII. While Edward R. Murrow reported from besieged London, Mary and her mother were evacuated from the shipbuilding city of Bristol to Devon, a small fishing town.

“Residents either grew veggies in their own garden plots or in Victory Gardens,” Evitt recalls. “Community gardens were sometimes grown on vacant land. Groceries were extremely scarce in an island-nation that imported about 70 percent of its food. Warfare impeded shipping. The government established rationing, which did not end until 1954 in the United Kingdom.” Rationing—and the welcome bounty of Victory Garden—were also instituted in the U.S.

Victory Gardens began growing in the U.S. and England during World War I. Over 5 million gardens were created on available private and public lands in the U.S. by the end of the war! During the Great Depression, many home gardens helped families survive the years of economic collapse and drought.



AmeriCorps Program Developer Mary Evitt with Skagit County Community Action Agency in Mount Vernon is organizing a victory garden effort to feed the hungry. She is shown with some greens in the Master Gardeners Discovery Garden at the Washington State University Mount Vernon research center. Photo: Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald

During WWII, massive labor shortages crippled large-scale agriculture as men & women joined went off to war, and Japanese-American farmers were interned to farm from their fields. Once again, Victory Gardens grew food for soldiers and civilians alike in England, U.S. and Australia. In the U.S., county extension agents provided seed, fertilizer and gardening tools. Twenty million Victory Gardens produced more than 40 % of the vegetables grown for fresh consumption in 1943, allowing more canned produce to feed the soldiers.

Recently, [First Lady Michelle Obama](#) planted a 1,100 square foot ‘Kitchen Garden’ on the White House lawn, following Eleanor Roosevelt's inspirational Victory Garden decades before. Roosevelt’s garden raised food for troops and civilians; Obama’s garden raises awareness of the need for healthier food, especially for children. Many schools are growing gardens where students learn to cultivate food and understand botany, soil biology, insects, and more. Then the students get to eat their homework! These gardens truly are food for thought.

Now it’s your turn! Victory Gardens of the past were planted in lawns, public parks and vacant lots. That big slab of turf around your house, the one you struggle to mow and weed, could be transformed into an array of colorful, nutritious vegetables for your family and others. You can also volunteer at one of many community and school gardens in our county.

Sharing healthy food with hungry neighbors, getting more exercise, using less fossil fuel to bring food to our tables – Victory Gardens can help us triumph over hunger, obesity and waste. Grab a shovel and dig in!

Victory Gardens – Skagit County
Mary Evitt, Program Developer
Skagit County Community Action Agency
330 Pacific Place, Mount Vernon
360-416-7585 ext. 1189

School Gardens – Volunteer!

La Conner Elementary School
Debbie Mendum , Program Coordinator
La Conner Alliance for Youth and Families
dmendum@lcsd.wednet.edu

Lincoln Elementary School, Mount Vernon
Rita Ordonez, Coordinator
School Garden and Family Cooking Classes
360-336-0932
ritaroma@earthlink.net

The Edible Schoolyard: www.edibleschoolyard.org

Community Gardens – Volunteer!

Some of these gardens have plots available for the public. All gardens welcome volunteers!

Anacortes Community Gardens
29th Street Garden (28th Street & Q Avenue)
Organized by *Skagit Beat the Heat*
Info: Betty Carteret 360-299-8553
sydst2@wavecable.com
www.cityofanacortes.org/Parks/CommunityGarden/index.htm

Bethany Covenant Church Community Garden
1318 S 18th Street
Mount Vernon
Info: Andy Anderson: 360-391-0713 or
andysylvia.anderson@gmail.com

"The Garden Gate Group" (G3)
Hillcrest Christian Fellowship
S 14th Street (Just north of Blackburn Road)
Mount Vernon
Info: Larry Ashby 360-428-0205

Church of the Nazarene
2710 Fir Street
Mount Vernon
Info: Pastor Bethany Somers
360-428-7974 or 202-7333
10% of food grown donated to local food banks

Unity Garden/Youth Program
2419 Continental Place
Mount Vernon
Info: Linda Vanderstoep 360-424-3073
Or Tori Talkington ahavista@ccsww.org

www.communitygarden.org/starting-a-community-garden.php

Resources:

- **Gardening in Western Washington: Vegetables** <http://gardening.wsu.edu/text/veges.htm>
- **Gardening in Western Washington: Frequently Asked Questions**
<http://gardening.wsu.edu/text/faqvege.htm>
- **Discovery Gardens' Vegetable Garden:** cultivated by Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners. Located west of the WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern WA Research & Extension Center, 16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway) and is open daily from dawn to dusk.

En Español:

- **Principios para Cultivar Vegetales:** http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies_sp/basics.html
- **Directorio de Vegetales** http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies_sp/directory.html
- **La construcción de camas elevadas** <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/ec/ec1537-s-e/>
- **Guía de Plantar para los Legumbres y Verduras**
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/em/em8769-s-e.pdf>