

### Victory Gardens

By Lynette Metza

August 2005 marked the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. In recognition of this event, the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust organized a number of exhibitions at the Fort Vancouver Historic Reserve and Pearson Airfield. This project commemorated the event and informed the public about the impact of the war on the "home front" and the various efforts undertaken by Americans with victory in mind. It was the nation's largest celebration observing the end of the war. Clark County Master Gardeners helped with the "Victory Garden" exhibit.

Victory Gardens were home vegetable gardens used to supplement family nutrition during World War II, when much of our agricultural output was being used to sustain the troops and otherwise supply the war effort. Americans were urged by the government to grow food to help supply the country while our industry and agriculture were diverted to the military. Canning and other forms of food preservation were other important aspects of the Victory Garden activities; Cooperative Extension agencies across the country were critical factors in educating Americans in these skills.

The concept of the Victory Garden was primarily a commitment to helping the war effort by not wasting materials, time, or resources; therefore a campaign urging people to grow and maintain a garden to supply their own family's needs was key. Some foods and other items of strategic importance were rationed, and people were educated and encouraged through articles in magazines and newspapers to garden and plan meals using unrationed foods. At the movies and on the radio (there was no TV), promotional advertisements encouraged the public to grow and maintain Victory Gardens.

Victory Gardens were an effective tool for conserving our resources, not just a propaganda tool. As a result of the campaign, there were estimated to be 20 million Victory Gardens producing 9 to 10 million tons of produce, an amount equal to that produced by commercial agriculture. In 1946 when people stopped planting gardens and before industry caught up with consumer needs, there were supermarket shortages of produce.

Gardens were planted in backyards, parks, zoos, parking lots (emptied by gas rationing), on rooftops, and on Ellis Island and Alcatraz. They were maintained by adults and children, many of whom had never gardened before. Vegetables grown in Victory Gardens included cabbage, tomatoes, green beans, corn, and potatoes, with variations for regional and ethnic favorites. Black-eyed peas probably would have been found in Clark County Victory Gardens because of the large number of defense workers from the Southern states working here at the Kaiser shipyards. Popular heirloom varieties were red-cored carrot, tennis ball lettuce, moon and stars watermelon, and telephone peas. Vegetables grown in the 1940s and still popular today are Black Seeded Simpson lettuce, Kentucky Wonder and Scarlet Runner beans, and Black Beauty Eggplant, among others.

There is a resurgence in interest in Victory Gardens independent of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The PBS TV series, Victory Garden, is in its 27<sup>th</sup> season and the Smithsonian Institute Museum of American History's exhibit "Within

These Walls” includes a Victory Garden. Many families are planting modern “Victory Gardens” in their own yards for better health and economy.

## Useful web sites

[Old House Web](#)

[Within These Walls](#)

## Book

Original guide to PBS series Victory Garden *Crocket's Victory Garden*, an illustrated guide has month by month guidance on gardening tailored toward the short growing season of the northeastern U.S., maybe similar to ours.