

# Victory Gardens

BY DAVID WALBERT



Figure 1. Members of a 4-H club show off their victory garden posters, 1943. 4-H members were asked not only to grow victory gardens but to convince their neighbors to grow them as well.



Figure 2. The USDA had promoted “farm gardens” during the Depression. When the U.S. entered the war, the government pitched gardening to urbanites, as well.

During the war, canned goods were rationed<sup>1</sup>, 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.”

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.

This media is available in the web edition only.

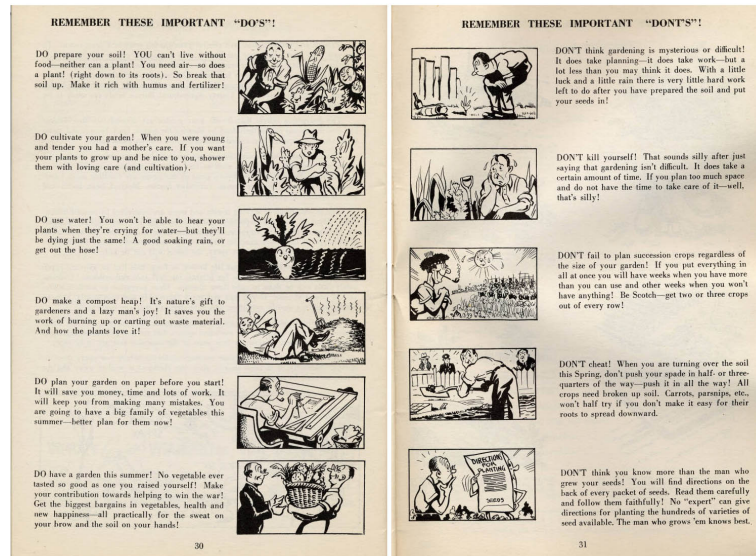


Figure 3. This book, designed to be sold where seeds and tools were sold, took a light approach to teaching first-time gardeners.

## 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<sup>2</sup>” (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.” (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<sup>4</sup>] (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.

---

## On the web

### More from LEARN NC

Visit us on the web at [www.learnnc.org](http://www.learnnc.org) to learn more about topics related to this article, including World War II, farming, food, gardens, history, and victory gardens.

## Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/5848>.
2. See <http://books.google.com/books?id=zIEEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA81#v=onepage&q=&f=false>.
3. See <http://books.google.com/books?id=500EAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA29#v=onepage&q=&f=false>.
4. See <http://books.google.com/books?id=YUgEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA40>.

## About the author

### DAVID WALBERT

David Walbert is Editorial and Web Director for LEARN NC in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education. He is responsible for all of LEARN NC's educational publications, oversees development of various web applications including LEARN NC's website and content management systems, and is the organization's primary web, information, and visual designer. He has worked with LEARN NC since August 1997.

David holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Garden Spot: Lancaster County, the Old Order Amish, and the Selling of Rural America*, published in 2002 by Oxford University Press. With LEARN NC, he has written numerous articles for K–12 teachers on topics such as historical education, visual literacy, writing instruction, and technology integration.

## Image credits

More information about these images and higher-resolution files are linked from the original web version of this document.

### Figure 1 (page 1)

Provided by the Green 'N' Growing Collection (The History of Home Demonstration and 4-H Youth Development in North Carolina), Special Collections, North Carolina State University Libraries. All Rights Reserved.

### Figure 2 (page 1)

By Herbert Bayer, created for WPA War Services, 1941–1943. This image is believed to be in the public domain. Users are advised to make their own copyright assessment.

### Figure 3 (page 2)

ABC of Victory Gardens: Backyard Farming Made Easy for All (New York: D.H. Bedford, 1943), pp. 30–31. Original image available from Ohio Historical Society (<http://cdm267401.cdmhost.com/u?p267401coll32,36>). Copyright ©1943. All Rights Reserved.