

Chapter 14

Garden for Victory! The American Victory Garden Campaign of World War II

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Abstract Remembered as a positive and widely popular effort, the American victory garden campaign of World War II illustrates a successful effort to encourage gardening as a response to the needs of a country in crisis. The popularity, effectiveness, and temporality of the victory garden campaign all reveal important aspects to ‘greening the red zone’. Although many people have simplified the intention to be primarily about increasing household food production, in truth it was a broad-based effort that envisioned gardening as an expression of patriotism and as a resource for recreation and restoration during a stressful time. The campaign also gives insight into what it takes to support a national, albeit a temporary, garden campaign and may shed light on what is necessary in addition if the goal is to sustain gardens permanently. The victory garden campaign is first contextualized in light of previous gardening campaigns that date back to the 1890s and typically arose in times of social or economic turmoil. In particular, comparison to the World War I war garden campaign reveals the acknowledgment of gardening as beneficial to broad social and emotional needs in time of war. The chapter then describes the campaign’s organizational structure, promotion, and participation. Description of the gardens reveals the complementary balance of social and personal benefits. The chapter concludes with a description of the end of the program and its legacy to community gardening efforts today.

Keywords War garden • Victory garden • World War I • World War II • Vegetable gardening

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Laura Lawson describes how the government, private industry, and citizens turned to gardening as a source of sustenance, pride, recreation, and solace during World War II. Such widespread gardening movements have emerged periodically during times of war, depression, and other stresses, with important lessons for current and future red zone scenarios.

Experienced gardener and novice alike answered the call to garden as part of the US domestic strategy during World War II. In 1942, Americans established an estimated 15 million gardens that produced 7.5 billion pounds of food, and in 1944, it was reported that between 18 and 20 million families had gardens that collectively provided 40 % of the total domestic vegetable supply (Wilson 1945). In cities, towns, and rural areas throughout the nation, garden advice was made readily available via newspapers, magazines, and radio. Vegetables, fruits, and flowers were cultivated in backyards, vacant lots, playgrounds, company grounds, schools, and parks. While acknowledging the stress and uncertainty of the world war, organizers and advocates of the garden campaign conveyed an organized, easy contribution to the war effort that not only showed patriotism but also reaped personal and social benefits as well. Aptly named ‘victory garden’, this campaign stressed positive outcomes, with the gardens presenting a tangible success when so much else in daily life and relationships was uncertain.

Spurred on by the national campaign, each community forged forward with its own approach to victory gardening. In San Francisco, for instance, demonstration gardens were set up in highly visible public spaces like Union Square and the Civic Center, and the city’s large pastoral Golden Gate Park provided space for victory garden plots on a first-come basis (1942). These efforts were led by the San Francisco Victory Garden Advisory Committee that included experts from local colleges and representatives from multiple public commissions, public departments, garden clubs, and local newspapers. Thousands attended the 1943 Victory Garden Fair in Golden Gate Park, with exhibits, entertainment, and experts on hand to provide advice. At the 1945 Victory Garden Show, the mayor crowned the Victory Garden Queen with a crown of parsley and radishes, and the mayor in turned received a ‘radish of monumental proportions, grown in San Francisco’, which he dutifully ate (1945b) (Fig. 14.1).

In Washington, DC, the 1943 season began with over 650 acres made available and over 35,000 applications filed by March 9 (1943a). Some of this land was public land, including along Rock Creek Park, as well as temporarily donated private property. Taking advantage of the resources available in the nation’s capital, residents could take gardening courses from extension agents and feel connected to political leaders who also gardened, as evidenced by newspaper photographs of Vice President Wallace next to 11-foot Bolivian corn (1943e). One local newspaper article encouraged participation by noting that ‘Three generals and a Senator have obtained garden plots on the Glover Estate and are preparing to get a bit of exercise and to get away from the war by chopping away at weeds during the late daylight hours of this spring and summer’ (1943d). But the campaign was not without conflict, including a debate, ultimately successful, to allow victory gardens in front



Fig. 14.1 A victory garden on a vacant lot in San Francisco, 1945 (Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library)

yards, and a later request, this time unsuccessful, to continue the extension education opportunities for gardening after the war (1943b, 1946b).

As the war neared its end, gardeners were urged to continue to garden even as the supportive campaign was being dismantled. In San Francisco, gardeners were urged to continue their gardens – reframing them as ‘survival gardens – to address the grim international food picture (n.a 1946c). With soldiers coming home and the return to normal work schedules, some promoters foresaw increased demand for gardening, however they also realized that the removal of building restrictions and the demand for housing and other civic improvements would threaten gardens that existed on temporarily donated sites. In Washington, DC, even as garden supporters scrambled to assure ongoing education opportunities and access to community garden land, newspaper articles started listing garden relocations and the pending closure of the staffed victory garden office (1946a) (Fig. 14.2). Although the demand for garden space was still high, the district’s commission reportedly stated that ‘[victory] gardening has no place as a ‘proper peacetime municipal function’ (n.a 1945a). Yet, while much of the top-down support dwindled, people continued to garden in backyards and in victory gardens that turned into community gardens. In DC today, some of the remnant victory gardens still exist along Rock Creek Park, as does the Glover Community Garden where senators and generals once gardened. And though no remnant of the victory garden remains in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, in July 2008, a group of volunteer gardeners, led by the artist studio Rebar, installed a victory garden at the San Francisco’s Civic Center Plaza to express the need and opportunities for local food production (Sullivan and Eaton 2008).



Fig. 14.2 A woman starting her garden in Northwest Washington DC, May 1943 (Photograph by Louise Roskam, US Office of War Information. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, photo LC-USW-3-28088-D)

Remembered as a positive and widely popular effort that got many people to garden, it is not surprising that many people today consider the victory garden campaign to be the precursor to contemporary community gardens. However, the success of the victory garden effort over 65 years ago and the current increased popularity of gardening both reiterate a recurring appeal to garden in times of social and economic crisis that has spurred a range of gardening campaigns since the 1890s (Lawson 2005). Specific campaigns include the vacant lot cultivation associations during the 1893–1897 depression to subsidize income for unemployed laborers; the school garden movement from the 1890s to 1920s that established gardens for educational purposes; a civic gardening campaign from the 1890s to 1910s to promote beautification; the war garden campaign of World War I; the subsistence and work relief gardens during the 1930s depression; victory gardens of World War II; and current community gardens. Each of these campaigns is shaped by its social, economic, and political context, yet they share many of the same beliefs about gardening as a way to promote health and nutrition, psychological restoration, social engagement, and environmental restoration. The episodic interest intensifies during periods of societal crisis – war, economic depression, civic unrest – when people are thrust into the red zone, either spatially or temporally, and turn to gardening as a direct, tangible means to address the local manifestation of larger crises (Bassett 1981; Lawson 2005). Gardens and gardening appeal during these times because they show results, are participatory, and are relatively inexpensive

when compared to larger structural change. Gardening is something that individuals can do to express engagement, and when hundreds, thousands, or millions of individual gardeners are seen working together under a shared movement, the results – the amount of food, the acreage of gardens, the social interaction, etc. – can be very impressive.

The victory garden campaign of World War II illustrates a successful effort to encourage gardening as a response to the needs of a country in crisis. The popularity, effectiveness, and temporality of the victory garden campaign all reveal important aspects to greening the red zone. Although many people have simplified the intention to be primarily about increasing household food production, in truth it was a broad-based effort that envisioned gardening as an expression of patriotism and as a resource for recreation and restoration during a stressful time. The campaign also gives insight into what it takes to support a national, albeit a temporary, garden campaign and may shed light on what is necessary in addition if the goal is to sustain gardens permanently. The remainder of this chapter will first contextualize the victory garden campaign in light of the previous World War I war garden campaign to reveal key shifts in justifying gardening as a domestic response to the war. It will then describe the World War II victory garden campaign's organizational structure, promotion, and participation. Description of the gardens reveals the complementary balance of social and personal benefits. The chapter concludes with a description of the end of the program and its legacy for community gardening efforts today.

From War Garden to Victory Garden

Everyone who creates or cultivates a garden helps, and helps greatly, to solve the problem of the feeding of nations... Woodrow Wilson (1917)

To understand the context that led to the victory garden campaign, it is useful to first look at its predecessor during the previous world war, the war garden campaigns of World War I. The United States' entry into World War I in 1917 came at a point when Europe faced a severe food crisis due to cut off supplies, destroyed crops, lack of farm labor, and increased demand from armed forces.¹ Within a larger volunteer conservation drive, civilian gardening was intended to supplement domestic food needs so that more food could be exported to Europe. The war garden campaign grew into a national effort that relied on the organizational capacity of involved government agencies, educational institutions, civic and gardening organizations, and local clubs to reach out to communities and individuals. Particularly influential were the volunteer organizations – those created specifically in response to the campaign like the National War Garden Commission, those reframed from

¹ Victory gardens were also significant to the war effort in Europe. For a general history, see Sherley Buswell, 'Victory Gardens: The Garden Warriors of 1942, Winning through 1943'. *City Farmer* <http://www.cityfarmer.org/victgarA57.html#vict%20garden1>

previous gardening programs like the federal Bureau of Education's school garden program solidifying into the US School Garden Army, and the national women's, civic, and gardening clubs that provided leadership to thousands of volunteers and activists at the local level. Any land not gardened was considered 'slacker land', pests were framed as enemies, and poor garden care was disparaged with language equivalent to having committed treason. Rallying to such slogans as 'hoe for liberty' and 'plant for freedom', five million gardeners grew \$520 million worth of food in 1918 alone (Pack 1919, p. 23). Given the success of the campaign, advocates hoped to continue to promote gardening for its health and civic benefits after the war, strategically renaming war gardens as 'victory gardens' (Pack 1918). But with the end of war also came an end to the promotion, borrowed organizational structure, and borrowed land. Interest dwindled and land was reclaimed for previous uses. Even garden programs that had existed prior to the war did not rebound to their previous levels of activity. For instance, though the US School Garden Army evolved from a popular school garden movement, interest in school gardening dwindled after the war ended and the Federal Office of School and Home Gardens closed in 1920 (Trelstad 1997).

In the fervor for action after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, leaders and citizens remembered the war gardens and again proposed gardening as part of the domestic war campaign. However, while in World War I food scarcity had been a concern to federal experts who urged citizens to grow food for household consumption, by the 1940s technological improvements in agriculture and transportation – plus the instituting of food ration stamps – suggested to agricultural experts and national leaders that gardening was an inefficient effort with little impact on national food security (Dickson 1944; United States Office of Civilian Defense n.d.). Instead, experts and government officials directing war food preparedness initially looked to increase farm productivity, rural gardening, and conservation and downplayed citizen gardening, particularly in denser suburban and urban areas. A 1941 report developed by subcommittees of the Department of Agriculture and the Federal Security Agency expressed many of the experts' concerns about the inefficiency of small individual gardens, particularly related to the waste of seed supplies, fertilizers, and insecticides. However, representatives of garden clubs and horticultural interests quickly urged expansion of the domestic food production program so that urban and suburban households could participate. Promoters of a new garden campaign cited similar benefits as had been used to validate the World War I war garden program, such as increasing domestic food supply, reducing pressure on transportation, and building morale. In addition, it was justified as a way to satisfy household tastes while also putting less demand on resources needed for the war effort. Not only could households enjoy more food diversity on their plates, but growing fresh foods at home also meant that more tin, labor, power, and machinery currently being used by the food industries could be directed to the war effort.

To discuss the benefits of a war garden program and to strategize the best means to orchestrate a national campaign, a National Defense Gardening Conference was held in Washington DC on December 19, 1941, and attended by over 300 horticultural experts, business leaders, educators, newspaper editors, and representatives of

garden clubs, youth organizations, and federal and state agencies. The resulting goals for the victory garden campaign included: increasing production and consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables through home, school, and community gardens; encouraging proper storage and preservation of surplus for use by families, local school lunches, and welfare agencies, and to meet local emergency food needs; enabling families and institutions to save on the cost of vegetables so that other foods could be purchased; providing community gardens for people without land; and improving morale and spiritual well-being of individuals, family, and nation (United States Office of Civilian Defense 1943, 3).

Orchestrating the Victory Garden Campaign

Gardening was included as part of the Food Fights for Freedom campaign to encourage compliance with national policies and to promote local engagement. This federal campaign provided national publicity while also linking individual programs to each other so that everyone involved could see the larger impact of their work. Campaign organizers relied on state and local institutions to implement policies, acknowledging that ‘Better than anyone else the people in the community itself will know what can and should be done’ (United States Office of Program Coordination, Office of War Information et al. 1943, 32). The campaign was conceptually structured along four general guides to action: produce, conserve, play square, and share. To meet production needs, the campaign urged citizens to volunteer as farm laborers and grow food for the household. To conserve, community groups were encouraged to promote nutritious eating habits, economical food substitutions, and food preservation through canning and to avoid wasting food and resources. Playing square referred to cooperation with rationing and pricing rules. Lastly, citizens were reminded that they were rationing their food in order to share with the armed forces and allied countries. The ultimate goal was conservation and self-production so that domestic demand on resources could be reduced. The campaign also organized nine individual informational programs on the following topics: farm production goals, victory gardens, home food preservation, nutrition, food conservation, farm labor programs, rationing, food price controls, and home front pledges.

The effort required coordination at the federal, state, and local level. A National Advisory Garden Committee was organized to coordinate multiple federal agencies, including the Office of Defense, Health, and Welfare Services; Department of Agriculture; Office of Civilian Defense; and Office of Education. These agencies offered support through their existing communication channels, educational materials, and technical assistance programs. An annual National Victory Garden Conference provided an opportunity to share information and develop national policies to direct federal agencies as well as guide state and local planning. Each year, a goal was set for the number of gardens to be cultivated. For example, in 1942, the target was 15 million gardens – five million on farms and ten million in towns, which was accomplished during that growing season.

In 1943, the goal was to increase to six million farm gardens and 12 million nonfarm gardens, which was again met. Based on federal guidelines but attentive to state conditions, each state then developed its own victory garden program and established goals for the desired number of gardens statewide. In similar fashion, the state victory garden councils then directed county committees to coordinate local efforts and distribute information.

Local victory garden committees usually included influential community members from real estate boards, chambers of commerce, and service clubs, as well as municipal agency directors, educators, and other advocates. They supported individual gardeners and school garden programs and operated community gardens, demonstration gardens, and canning centers. Many groups organized neighborhoods through block captains who supervised community and vacant-lot gardens and provided individual encouragement to residents in a neighborhood. Through registration campaigns, the local committees kept records of civilian contributions to the national food supply. These activities also relied on the participation of civic, women's, and garden clubs that provided advice, established demonstration gardens, assisted school gardens, and sponsored garden shows and contests.

Victory gardens received a boost through participation by businesses and industries. Florists', nurserymen's, and seedsmen's associations encouraged their members to provide land, greenhouses, seed, and technical assistance to local campaigns. Some companies, industries, utilities, and railroads encouraged their workers to garden by providing land, seeds, technical assistance, and incentives. Participation by industries and companies was buoyed by the work of the National Victory Garden Institute, a nonprofit educational enterprise financed entirely by industry to promote victory gardening through information, contests, and publicity. The National Victory Garden Institute encouraged companies to initiate garden programs not only as an act of patriotism but also as a way to improve employee morale and performance. An exemplary company was the Firestone Tire Company that encouraged workers to garden at home and in company-provided community gardens, and provided seeds sufficient to plant half the plot, insecticides, and fertilizers (Lyons 1943). Approximately 2,500 employees gardened on 150 acres either owned or leased by Firestone. The company also offered cash prizes for model gardens, a demonstration garden, and harvest show, and loaned pressure cookers for canning (Fig. 14.3).

The Broad Appeal and Promotion of Victory Gardens

Whereas much of the World War I promotion of gardening appealed to American selflessness in the face of the European food crisis, the World War II campaign often highlighted the tangible benefits to individuals and households who gardened as part of the campaign. For instance, M. L. Wilson of the Federal Security Agency, equated war-preparedness with personal health for every man, woman and child: '[One] cannot expect to be physically fit, mentally alert, and ready to 'take it' unless a well-balanced diet, including plenty of fruits and vegetables, has provided that

Fig. 14.3 Victory garden poster by artist Robert Gwathney (Courtesy of National Archives, photo NWDNS-44-PA-368)



energy and fuel which is necessary to keep in topnotch condition all of the time' (Condon 1943, 11). With newspapers and bulletins popularizing recent scientific reports that found Americans had poor eating habits, and with the National Draft Board reporting that 40 % of youth did not pass their physical examinations because of undernourishment, Americans were encouraged to increase their intake of minerals and vitamins by consuming fresh fruits and vegetables (Roberts 1943; Mack et al. 1944). This campaign was intended to not only help the war effort but also encourage better long-term eating habits.

Besides good food, civilians needed activities that would reinvigorate body and soul so they could keep up with the demands of the domestic war effort. Because gas and rubber restrictions limited the ability to travel to recreational outlets, Americans needed local leisure activities. Victory gardening was promoted as a pleasant preoccupation rather than a burden. While growing food was important, so was the enjoyment of gardening as recreation and respite. Promotional materials would often include light-hearted comments about the growing preference among office workers for the rake and hoe over the golf club and tennis racket. Judge Marvin Jones, War Food Administrator, characterized the symbiotic relationship of gardening to the war economy and personal needs in a speech before the National Victory Garden Conference in 1944.

The Victory garden program is one of the finest illustrations we have had in this war of a job that civilians at home can do to back up the boys who are fighting. Working in a garden for an hour or two at the end of a busy day spent in an office or factory has provided

a wonderful balance wheel to millions who have worked day after day at war jobs with little or no vacation or recreation. Contact with the earth, and with growing things, is good for all of us, especially in times like these when we are all working so hard in the jobs assigned to us (Jones 1944, p. 5).

In addition to nutritional health and physical exercise, gardening also promoted psychological health. Statements regarding the therapeutic nature of gardening by Fredrick P. Moersch of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, were frequently cited in promotional literature. He asserted that gardening eased the emotional unrest caused by war and uncertainty and that physical and mental health went together: 'For the person who is on edge, anxious and sleepless, and has a heavy heart, there is no more hope-inspiring, restful, healthful recreation than gardening. One might speak properly of gardening as a work cure' (Moersch 1943, 75). As a restorative hobby, gardening occupied the mind and body and thus relieved stress felt by families who had loved ones in the war. Illinois Food Director Lester Norris noted that 'many parents with sons somewhere in foxholes in the South Pacific or North Africa have found solace by working in their gardens—close to nature—feeling that they too were contributing something personally to the effort to win the war' (Norris 1943, 3). Gardening also provided an outlet for patriotism as well as rehabilitation for those injured in the war. For example, concerning her work at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey, Mrs. Stephen Van Hoesen reported that men with mental and physical disabilities were frequently sent to the garden where they could casually talk about their problems while occupied in gardening activities (Van Hoesen 1944).

The public learned about victory gardens through written materials, film, and public events. Participating federal, state, and local agencies and organizations produced a proliferation of books, reports, pamphlets, and mimeographed handouts. Garden and home magazines along with local newspapers published advice columns and special interest stories. For example, the popular magazine *House and Garden* produced two victory garden supplements in 1942 and regularly included monthly calendars of garden activities, garden stories, and pictures of gardens. Posters with mottoes such as 'Vegetables for Victory' and 'Food for Freedom' were displayed in store windows, libraries, gardens, and homes to encourage support. Radio and film were also used to promote participation. One short film that might have been seen before a feature film was a humorous lesson in proper gardening that featured comic Jimmy Durante and his straight-man son. Potential gardeners were also encouraged through demonstration gardens, classes, and events. Boston Commons and other popular parks and plazas were plowed for demonstration gardens that provided visual information and classes. Harvest shows were a popular forum for publicity and fundraising. Contests and exhibitions were organized to spark friendly competition.

Everyone was encouraged to participate. Garden advocates often lauded victory gardens as democratizing experience that brought together people from all walks of life. In addition to photo displays showing the gardens of movie stars and millionaires and accounts of the office secretaries and factory workers stopping by their gardens after work, the public also heard about victory gardens tended by the military stationed in the Pacific Rim, by Japanese Americans in relocation camps, and by Native



Fig. 14.4 A 1943 photograph used in a San Francisco paper showing how women starting a victory garden in San Francisco had improvised child supervision so they could work (Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library)

Americans on reservations. Victory gardening was praised as an important family pastime. One piece of radio advertising described the garden as a family training ground where a child ‘learned fascinating lessons about Nature and developed healthful ways of occupying his time that is denied kids who never had the opportunity to work and play with their elders in a family garden’ (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA] 1945, n.p.). In addition to participating in family gardens, children also had gardening opportunities through their churches, 4-H clubs, boys and girls scouts, parks and recreation programs, and other venues (Fig. 14.4).

The Victory Garden Itself

The desire to encourage efficient gardens during wartime is encapsulated in the title of a 1942 article in the USDA’s *Land Policy Review*: ‘Gardens, Yes, But with Discretion’. The goal was to promote gardens, but as temporary and not at the sacrifice of established ornamental spaces. Most promotional literature emphasized larger suburban home gardens and community gardens. For those who wanted to start gardens in their backyards, USDA experts advised to start small in an inconspicuous location that did not destroy existing lawns or flowerbeds. For those who did not have adequate private space or lived in apartments, experts

urged participation in community gardens, vacant-lot gardens, school gardens, and company-run industrial gardens.

Victory garden promoters were quick to realize the advantages of community gardens because of their efficiency, centrality for instruction and materials, and their social aspect. Community gardens were typically located on larger pieces of property, often at the city's edge or on underutilized public land. The gardens, managed by municipalities, victory garden committees, colleges, or voluntary organizations, were organized so that urban and suburban families could acquire a plot of land easily and efficiently. Specific management varied for each garden in terms of how applications were processed, size of gardens, access to water and tools, and so on. But along with these benefits, community gardens also posed some risks, particularly theft and vandalism. To deter theft, some garden committees organized volunteer watches during key harvest times and some cities set up fines for trespass, willful damage, or theft from a community garden.

Vacant-lot gardens were arranged on a case-by-case basis in a more informal manner than community gardens. Typically, a vacant-lot garden was the project of one or more households who claimed a lot near their homes for gardening. Advocates often validated both community gardens and vacant-lot gardens as means to beautify otherwise neglected land. At the 1943 National Victory Garden Conference in Chicago, Fred Heuchling, assistant director to Chicago's program, was eager to show conference participants the transformation of 'ugly weed-infested, rock and brick-strewn' vacant lots through volunteer efforts into 'neat, orderly, and productive gardens' (Heuchling 1943, 19). Not only were these gardens good for food production, but they also facilitated general community beautification.

To keep the individual victory garden manageable and to discourage waste, most sources advised gardeners to plan their gardens based on nutritional value, anticipated shortages of certain foods, family tastes, and how much time could be devoted to gardening. Gardeners were encouraged not to 'bite off more than they can chew'. Instead of being laborious, victory gardening was intended to fit into the busy lives of war workers and be enjoyable. Not all memories from the World War I campaign were positive, and many sources tried to avoid the overzealousness remembered from the earlier era that had resulted in wasted seed, sore backs, poor harvests, and bad memories of gardening as a chore. H.W. Hochbaum, chairman of USDA's committee on victory gardens, considered an hour a day to be adequate for maintaining a backyard garden (Hochbaum 1943, 3). Community gardeners were encouraged to work in gardens that were convenient to their homes so they could tend them two or three times a week, either after work or on weekends.

With the aim of minimizing waste and maximizing nutritional output, USDA's 1943 *Victory Garden Leader's Handbook* provided guidelines for calculating a family's nutritional needs and planning a garden accordingly. Many manuals and articles in popular magazines provided information on planting based on experience and household composition and suggested plant varieties for nutrition, taste, variety, and utility. In order to encourage new eating habits, cooking advice, recipes, and storage tips were frequently included in victory garden literature.

Victory Gardens After the War

As the war progressed and victory seemed just around the corner, government and civilian groups urged the public to continue gardening as part of the postwar reconstruction. At the 1945 National Victory Gardening Conference, experts acknowledged the continued need for 20 million victory gardens. There was a note of urgency in the postwar appeals that had been largely absent from the victory garden campaign during the war. President Harry Truman was quoted as stressing the need for victory gardens after the war:

The United States and other countries have moved food into war-torn countries in record amounts, but there has been a constantly widening gap between essential minimum needs and available supplies. The threat of starvation in many parts of the world and the urgent need for food from this country emphasize the importance of continued effort to add to our total food supply this year. A continuing program of gardening will be of a great benefit to our people (United States Department of Agriculture 1946, 1).

Advocates also hoped that Americans would continue to garden for health, recreation, and beautification. Even before the war ended, garden writer Richardson Wright pressed gardening as a hobby and part of a balanced home life, stating, 'Let us not, come peace, drop this effort to produce bodily and spiritual food, considering it merely an emergency measure. We can never go back to the old ways' (Wright 1942, 5).

However, as the government-directed campaign diminished, so too did resources associated with it, particularly the organizational capacity, technical assistance, and access to land. Most of the land made available for community gardens and vacant lot gardens reverted to previous uses. In some communities, community victory garden sites evolved to serve as community gardens that persist today, such as the Fenway Victory Gardens in Boston or Rainbow Beach Victory Garden in South Chicago. For some people, the desire to continue gardening was satisfied by the postwar expansion of suburban housing that made backyard gardening a possible hobby and avocation.

Conclusion: The Victory Garden Legacy

The victory garden campaign is warmly remembered by many people as a national effort that blended patriotism with personal motivation. For many Americans who did not experience the immediate war zone, the garden served as a physical space of purpose and local action, but also of refuge and resource. Not only did gardening provide an outlet for citizens to aid in the war effort, it also provided a local solution to recreation, health, and morale needs. The structure of the national program formed around the efficient dispersal of information. Instead of starting anew, the campaign made use of existing governmental agencies, institutions, and organizations to orchestrate local gardening efforts. Designed to address the immediate war crisis, the organization that supported victory gardening was not

meant to be permanent. By getting millions of households to garden, however, the victory garden campaign did reinforce an interest in gardening.

Everyone was encouraged to participate to the extent that they could, with positive attitudes about the multiple personal, communal, and national benefits achieved through their engagement. This acknowledgment of gardening as both a resource for essential needs and as an enjoyable avocation was a subtle yet significant shift from previous gardening campaigns that tended to stress food production, education and character building, or economic incentives (Lawson 2005). As we see in the current community garden movement, gardening is advocated for multiple benefits that overlap and blend together personal, community, and environmental improvements. Various and simultaneous needs or opportunities may catalyze involvement, but if gardening is not enjoyable it is hard to sustain the effort.

At the same time that the victory garden campaign could garner support through its justification of many social and personal benefits to be derived, it was framed as a temporary program. Through the orchestrated tiers of support, the victory garden campaign was able to provide access to land and resources through public means to those with or without private means. But with peace and prosperity the agents of the campaign shifted to other priorities and access to public land and resources diminished. The challenge for current and future garden campaigns is to acknowledge the benefits associated with gardening, to garner a broad range of support from the grassroots to federal policy, and to instill a sense of permanence to this effort that will be sustained in times of peace as well as crisis.

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