

## Victory Gardens

During WWI and WWII, the Federal Government encouraged anyone who could to plant victory gardens. Many soldiers and citizens avoided going hungry because of efforts of the average citizen. Guides were published by the War Department on how to be successful and minimize waste. During these times, many cities had committees made of experienced gardeners to assist those who knew little about cultivating plants. Many companies additionally allowed employees to plant gardens on company property and provided irrigation water and other supplies to assist in gardeners' efforts.

Few to no garden centers existed from which to purchase vegetable starts. Gardeners had to know what to plant directly in the garden from seed and what they needed to start early on their own. Starting things early often involved building a structure known as a hotbed. Hotbeds were constructed of a wood frame at a dimension of three by six feet. They were covered with glass and heated using decomposing horse manure buried beneath the growing area. Heat from decomposition kept the hotbed at temperatures between 70 and 90 degrees F for a couple of months. The rotted manure was later removed and used as mulch in the garden. The overall structure looked similar to a miniature greenhouse.

Victory gardeners were encouraged to plan ahead and keep thorough records by the war department. Examples of this included gardeners having to know how many seeds to plant for sufficient yields to support themselves later on. They were encouraged to record seed germination rates, success of watering methods, diseases or insects they may have observed and what they did to control them.

As gardens matured and crops were harvested, part of a successful victory garden included recording the number of pounds of produce obtained from the garden, how much of it was eaten fresh, how much was preserved and total not consumed. From this, gardeners could improve the next year's garden and minimize waste to help in the war effort.

Most today have not experienced this style of gardening due to having not faced such a major crisis and modern convenience. However, this style of gardening is becoming more popular due to how the economy has been over the last few years, the desire of many to become more self-sufficient and just for hobby.

For those wanting to learn more of this and even start their own vegetables as was more commonly done in the past, modern technology has made it easier. For example, if one desires to build a hotbed, it can be heated using electrical heat tape instead of manure, or plants can easily be started indoors using florescent bulbs. Some experimentation and practice is needed as well as similar planning and record keeping as in the past. Now is the time to start the process so that everything is ready. Some vegetables such as peppers must be started eight to ten weeks before the last frost. Over the next few months more specifics on how to start your own garden will be given in this column.