

Revive victory gardens now

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Plant a "victory garden" for the new economy! This is a good time to save money by planning a vegetable garden for a sunny spot in your yard or lawn.

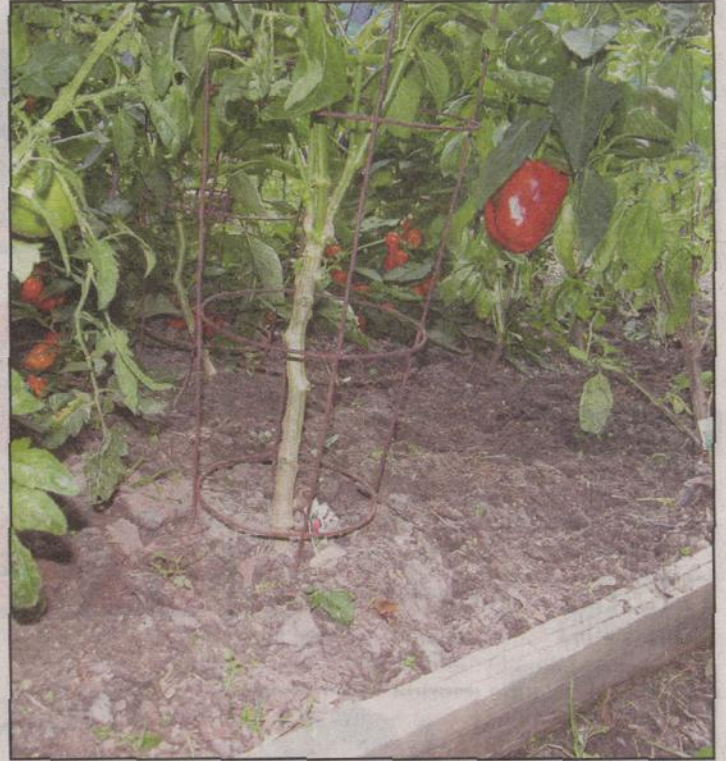
Victory gardens were vegetable gardens planted by people in backyards and lawns during World War II, and these produced a lot of the vegetables eaten in the U.S. — up to 40 percent! Victory gardens even existed in cities, such as in my old neighborhood in upper Manhattan, where I was told there had been community gardens in the yard of a local church and behind some of the apartment buildings.

As many gardeners already know, growing your own vegetables is a rich and rewarding experience with many benefits — eating fresh organic food available right outside your door, the incomparable experience of getting your hands in the soil and watching plants grow, and saving money at the supermarket and gas station.

Vegetable gardening is a great family activity — fun and educational, and a good way to bond with your neighbors too. If you don't have much experience growing vegetables, it's really so easy to grow at least a few tomatoes, green peppers, cucumbers and zucchini.

In our back yard in downtown Dover, we have two raised beds where we produce what to me is an amazing quantity of vegetables, with minimal effort (we both have full-time jobs that keep us busy). Our gardening efforts involve planting, occasional weeding, and watering during dry spells. And, of course, the best part — picking and eating, often as we are preparing a meal and need something like a tomato. Our biggest effort is digging compost into the soil at the beginning of the year, once the soil thaws out.

The following is what we typically plant in our vegetable garden. Early in the spring, around St. Patrick's Day, we plant seeds of cool weather items: salad greens (a "mesclun" or "spring" mix of different tender leaf lettuces, arugula etc.), beets (wonderful as a



Delaware State University/Susan Yost.

A backyard vegetable garden in Kent County, with red peppers, basil, tomatoes and hot peppers in a raised bed.

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cooked vegetable or made into borscht soup), parsley (parsley seeds sprout quicker if soaked in water first), carrots, and Swiss chard (a great green that is easily cooked like spinach, and tolerant of cold and heat, growing well right through the summer into the fall).

Then after the last frost (usually in late April/early May in Kent County), we plant the warm-weather vegetables. We purchase small plants of several varieties of tomatoes (flavor extraordinary compared to the supermarket types), sweet green/red peppers, eggplants, cucumbers, and hot peppers.

Zucchini and yellow squash seeds are planted in little hills of soil. Green beans and lima beans, grown from seed, climb up a teepee of poles or a very large wire cage. Oh, and, basil! — practically indestructible; all you need to do is pinch off the flowers periodi-

cally. Right now, our freezer is full of pesto (an unforgettable sauce for pasta made of basil, olive oil, parmesan cheese, garlic, and pine nuts/walnuts), which we make and freeze into easy-to-use chunks in ice-cube trays.

We grow a few perennial herbs, such as sage and chives, which we toss into omelets. I also try to save a little space to plant zinnias, to fill vases with these cheerful flowers throughout the summer.

So, enjoy the positive aspects of these changing economic times by doing more local activities, enjoying a closer community, and changing your sterile, herbicide-gobbling lawn into a "victory" vegetable garden!

Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost, Herbarium Educator) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, or for more information about this article.