

Why Not Plant A Victory Garden?

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

During World Wars I and II supplies, including food were often in short supply. There was often rationing. Even though many people had home vegetable gardens in those days, there was a movement to do even more with families growing more of their food to be more self sufficient and to make more food available to the war effort.

Covid-19 isn't like World War I or II, but it is a war. This time the enemy is invisible. Gardening is not as common or wide spread as it was during those two World Wars, but maybe it is time to revive the concept of a Victory Garden. We have no idea how long this battle will last. It may very well be longer than many of us would like. But it's also occurring at a time when we can get a timely start on getting a garden growing. I don't anticipate that most homes will grow enough vegetables to can or freeze to provide several months of food. But a garden is a good way to get outside, as a family, work together on a project, and ultimately wind up enjoying some vegetables that you and your family grew themselves.

If you have never gardened before I would suggest that you don't turn the entire backyard into a garden. Start smaller with maybe a 20 by 20 or 20 by 30 foot plot. This is something small enough that you could till it up with a spade if you wanted to. It may take a few evenings or maybe an entire weekend, but it could be done. If it's just rained though, please wait for it to dry out. If a rototiller is available from a neighbor or rental store it may make this a little easier too. The spot should get as much sun as possible. Full sun would be ideal but at least 8 to 9 hours preferred. Avoid walnut trees and don't be under the drip line of any tree. Walnut trees release a chemical into the soil that can harm some garden plants and the competition for sunlight and nutrients, because of the tree roots, will greatly hinder your garden's performance.

At the end of this article I've listed a website where you can go and view many documents about home vegetable gardening. One of the most useful is one called Vegetable Garden Planting Guide. It has excellent charts to show you how much of each crop to plant per person, general guidelines on how deep to plant seeds, how far apart in the row, how far apart the rows should be and my favorite part, a garden calendar to show when to plant each crop and when you can expect to harvest. Also pay attention to the bulletin on fertilizing gardens.

April is still too early to plant the ever popular tomatoes and other warm season crops. Unless you have a really BIG garden, don't waste time with sweet corn. Make use of planting short season crops like radishes and leaf lettuce now and once they've been harvested you can follow up with warmer weather crops like tomatoes and vine crops. One of the first implements you will want to have, other than a shovel, is a hoe. You will get a fine selection of weeds and a hoe is the best way to deal with those pesky unwanted plants!

Vegetable crops you can plant in the first half of April include: beets, collards, chard, carrots, lettuce, potatoes, radishes, onion sets or onion plants, peas, spinach and turnips. These are all direct seeded into the soil. Transplants you can consider planting now are what we call the cole crops, those being cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Once we get into early May then we can start planting beans, all of the vine crops, tomatoes, peppers and eggplant.

Go to the web site: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/publications/vegetables.html> and you will find a great list of vegetable gardening bulletins. If you have any questions, give me a call at the Extension Office, 785-238-4161.