



Every year when the weather transitions from early spring to late spring, as lawns and trees start to become green, people yearn to get outside. We watch things grow and even get the urge to grow things ourselves. In early 1945, growing things was not just a seasonal desire, it was part of the response to an international emergency.

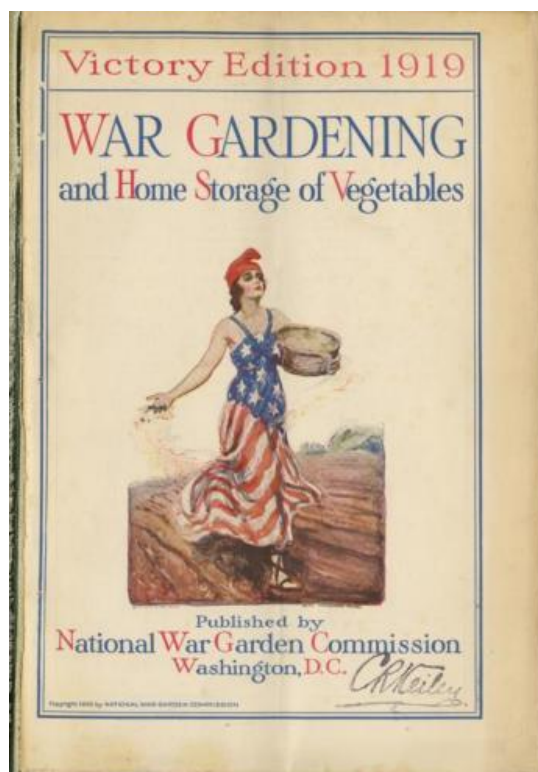
The worldwide war created the need for food to supplement agricultural crops and food supplies that were disrupted by the conflict. There was also the fear of food shortages at home caused by the war. As with many other activities on the home front, there was the desire to do something to contribute to the war effort.



(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 April 14, page 3)

Secretary of Agriculture [Claude R. Wickard](#) proposed "[Victory gardens](#)" not long after the United States became involved in World War II. Americans planted vegetable gardens in their backyards, vacant lots, and public places. There was even a Victory garden at the Arlington Race Track in Chicago and also one at a zoo in Portland, Oregon. A side benefit to all of this vegetable production was the introduction of previously unfamiliar vegetables to the national palate and increased canning and preservation of nutritious food. In 1943, 20.5 million Victory gardens produced one-third of all the vegetables consumed that year.<sup>1</sup>

The concept was not unprecedented. During World War I, the government encouraged Americans to produce their own food with "war gardening." President Woodrow Wilson appointed future president Herbert Hoover to run the [U.S. Food Administration](#). People were encouraged to voluntarily produce more and consume less. This program was so successful that Americans never experienced food rationing during the First World War as they did during World War II.<sup>2</sup>



(Virginia Museum of History & Culture)

Claude R. Wickard went from running a 380-acre corn and hog farm in Indiana to working for the [Department of Agriculture](#) in 1933. He rose through that agency until he became Secretary of Agriculture in 1939 when his boss, Henry Wallace, resigned to become the nominee for Vice-President. Wickard pushed for all-out food production by American farmers, and Victory gardens extended that philosophy to the rest of the citizenry. In November 1941, even before the United States officially entered the war, Wickard had a vision of feeding Great Britain and the United States, as well as the post-war world. He was an advocate for reciprocal trade agreements between countries for agricultural commodities and products. Wickard also saw the need for higher nutrition standards to raise the international standard of living. He said, "Food will win the war and write the peace."<sup>3</sup>

<b>Plants, Seed</b>	<b>50</b>
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**Plant A**  
**Victory Garden**  
*and Save!*

**WE HAVE THE**

☆ **SEEDS**

**MANDERVILLE-KING**  
**DICKENSON'S**  
**FERRY'S**

☆ **VIGORO**

**FOR A HEALTHIER GARDEN**

—and—

☆ **GARDEN TOOLS**

**TAUSCHE'S**  
**La Crosse's Largest Hardware Store**

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 4, page 9)

It did not take long for Wickard's idea of [Victory gardens](#) to become a hot topic in the United States. In January 1942, newspapers around the country were touting the program as one of the ways anybody could help the war effort. There were conferences, workshops, and helpful advice on how to create a bountiful [Victory garden](#) on almost any vacant spot of land.

A Kansas publication put it this way:

Gardens are essential for four reasons: Good nutrition, to cut food cost, to provide adequate diet if availability of familiar foods is cut off, and to release foods for other sources such as the army and navy. . . . Will your garden be a spring fever or a summer reality?<sup>4</sup>

## ATTENTION FARMERS AND VICTORY GARDENERS

NOW IS THE TIME to spray your Trees with Lime Sulphur and Arsenate of Lead and treat your Seed Grain, Corn and Potatoes with Ceresan, Semesan or Formaldehyde.

**REMEMBER** we also carry a complete line of Bordeaux Mixture, Arsenate of Lead, Lime Sulphur, Triogen, Cenol Garden Dust, Sulrote, Paris Green, Dusting Sulphur, Special Potato Spray, Kryocide, etc.

Let Us Figure Out What You Need . . . GET IT AT

# HOESCHLERS'

THE PRESCRIPTION PHARMACISTS

Cor. Main at Fifth Ave.

Bring Your Prescriptions to Us.

We also carry a complete line of Remedies, Vaccines and Bacterins for the welfare of your stock.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 April 30, page 8)

The [Office of Civilian Defense](#) sponsored many gardens that were divided into plots for individual families. Surplus produce could be directed to school lunch programs.<sup>5</sup>

In La Crosse, the city government took the lead. The city engineering department plowed and staked garden plots at the old [Salzer airfield](#) at Losey Boulevard South and Green Bay Street. There were almost 150 plots, each one measuring 50 by 100 feet.<sup>6</sup> With the war in Europe reaching its climax, perhaps the anxiety about food rationing was starting to fade. Even as late as June 1, 1945, there were still several plots available there.<sup>7</sup> The city parks department also created 110 plots near the golf course next to Hixon Forest.<sup>8</sup>

The [La Crosse Garden Club](#) initiated a junior victory garden committee to enlist young gardeners. The chair was Mrs. C. F. Sutor; other members were Mes. Lillian Gottschalk, J. T. Wright, H. K. Holley, B. A. Spangler, and M. Rosenstein. They visited all the public and parochial schools in early 1945 to sign up almost 100 youngsters to grow vegetables for their families. Logan Junior High School showed the most interest with 38 enrollments. The young gardeners were asked to keep a record book of their garden and exhibit at least five different vegetables at the fall harvest festival sponsored by the La Crosse Garden Club.<sup>9</sup>

**SUPPLIES**  
For Your  
**Victory Garden**

Just estimate how much you can save on  
crisp, fresh garden vegetables by growing your  
own.

TOMATOES, CARROTS, PEAS, SWISS CHARD,  
LETTUCE, SPINACH, CABBAGE

COMPLETE STOCK OF  
**BURPEE SEEDS**  
Including Your Favorite Flowers . . .  
DELPHINIUM, COSMOS, POPPIES, SWEET WILLIAMS,  
SWEET PEAS, etc.

**TOOLS -- SUPPLIES**  
HOES, SPADES, SHOVELS, RAKES, TROWELS, HOSE,  
GARDEN GLOVES and GARDEN APRONS.

**VIGORO**  
FOR A HEALTHIER GARDEN

**FIRESTONE STORE**  
7TH AND MAIN

*(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 May 24, page 19)*

The [Boy Scouts of America](#) set out to plant 500,000 Victory gardens in 1945. Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts could earn a green thumb certificate for planting, tending, and harvesting a Victory garden. Those that met a higher set of criteria were eligible for the General McArthur Medal awarded by the National Victory Garden Institute.<sup>10</sup>

In rural areas, [4-H Clubs](#) were active in the Victory garden program. Boys and girls in this organization for farm youth planted 1,000,000 Victory gardens.<sup>11</sup>

Americans planted more than 18,000,000 [Victory gardens](#) every year during the war.<sup>12</sup> Even though these gardens produced a sizeable amount of vegetables for domestic consumption, they may have had even more value as morale and community builders.<sup>13</sup>

Thursday, May 17, 1945

### VICTORY GARDEN LAMENT

Victory Garden need it so  
Plants and seed, row on row  
Big bugs come, little bugs too  
Kill'em all, no one can do.

Heap big rain, come down quiock  
Make my garden, one big creek  
Weeds hop up, hide'em rows,  
Me pulls and pulls, hoe and hoe.

See'em beans on the vine,  
Carrots too, mighty fine  
Tomatoes big, getting ripe,  
Put in jars, seal'em tight.

Put on shelf, row on row  
See, me smart, me no know,  
Back do ache, feet do swell  
War aint won, me tired as hell.

(*The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 May 17, page 8)

Visitors to the National Museum of American History in Washington D.C. can stroll through The Victory Garden, a re-creation of a World War II Victory Garden.<sup>14</sup>

Now the city of La Crosse is promoting [public food gardens](#), harkening back to the Victory gardens of the 1940s, as a way to address food insecurity.<sup>15</sup> Time will tell if the modern incarnation is as productive combating an internal enemy as the original Victory gardens were with external ones.

Jeff Rand  
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#### Sources & Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Ronald H. Bailey, *The Home Front: U.S.A.* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1977), 108.

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- <sup>2</sup> "Victory Gardens," *Virginia Museum of History & Culture*, accessed 2020 May 7, <https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/victory-gardens>.
- <sup>3</sup> Luther Huston, "On the Food Front: Secretary Wickard directs the campaign to 'win the war and write the peace' by producing more from our farms," *The New York Times*, 1941 November 9, page SM9.
- <sup>4</sup> "Victory Gardens," *The Lyon County Farm Bureau News*, Emporia, Kansas, 1942 January 1, page 1.
- <sup>5</sup> "U.S. May Revive 'Victory Gardens,'" *Cumberland Evening Times*, Cumberland, Maryland, 1942 January 12, page 2.
- <sup>6</sup> "Lots For Gardens Available At Old Salzer Airport Site," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 19, page 12.
- <sup>7</sup> "Garden Plots Available," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 1, page 5.
- <sup>8</sup> "City Victory Gardens Ready For 'Farmers,'" *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 16, page 4.
- <sup>9</sup> "Stepped-Up Interest Shown In Gardens," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 16, page 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Scouts Seek Special Medal For Gardens, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 May 20, page 5.
- <sup>11</sup> "Unfortunate If True," *The Logan Daily News*, Logan, Ohio, 1945 December 27, page 4. The focus of the 4-H organization has since expanded beyond just farm youth.
- <sup>12</sup> *Harrisburg Telegraph*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1945 November 2, page 10.
- <sup>13</sup> David M. Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 863.
- <sup>14</sup> "Victory Garden," *Smithsonian Institution*, accessed 2020 May 7, <https://gardens.si.edu/gardens/victory-garden/>.
- <sup>15</sup> Olivia Herken, "A symbol of relief," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2020 April 6, page A1.