



HOW TO START A VICTORY GARDEN

It is no wonder that with job losses, remote working, children at home, social distancing and self-isolation there is renewed interest in the “Victory Garden.” Most of us have heard of victory gardens, first started around World War I and gaining increased importance during World War II. Food rationing was part of life during both world wars, so the government urged Americans to pitch in by tending home garden plots. Millions of Americans did pitch in. Neighbors grew different vegetables and shared their produce with each other. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 20 million American homes had a victory garden.

Whether your interest in growing food is to reduce trips to the grocery store or to enjoy a garden’s rewards and pleasures, starting your own victory garden is simple. For those who do not have a garden spot available, container gardening is a great alternative.

Starting from Seed

- Use a seed starting potting mix, these types of mixes will have a lighter composition of materials that allow for adequate air and drainage. If you use too heavy of a mix, the seeds could rot.
- Seeds need warm soil temperatures and moisture to germinate. A germination mat will increase soil temperature and provide faster germination but is not necessary. A clear cover or dome over the container will help keep humidity high and aid in germination.
- Use a south facing (sunny window) for direct sunlight if not using a grow light.



Selecting and Transplanting to Larger Containers

- For transplanting, it's best to use a commercially available soilless mix. These lightweight pH-adjusted products are free of pests, weed seeds, diseases and insects.
- Almost any container will work as long as it has drainage holes. Select a container that provides adequate space for roots. A container that is too small will result in restricted root growth and poor plant development.
- When transplanting a small plant, be careful not to break the small root ball that holds the roots and soil together. Always place the plant in the new container at the same soil level at which the plant was grown. Tomato plants are the one exception; they grow better with more of their stem buried.

Fertilizing

- Most vegetables require consistent, even watering and full sun.
- The majority of vegetables require a moderate amount of fertilization, though a few, including cucumbers, squash and tomatoes, are heavy feeders and require extra nutrients to produce healthy fruit.
- Provide the plants with a complete fertilizer of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Mix compost and worm castings into your soil to provide a good source of slow release nutrients and build the soil.

Growing Outdoors

- Moving your plants outdoors in the springtime requires a little patience. Allow the new plants to acclimate to their new environment, especially cooler nighttime temperatures. Put the plants outside



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during the day and bring them back in at night, then gradually keep them outside at night after a few days. Of course, be ready to cover the plants or bring them in should freezing temperatures occur.

This worldwide health crisis is an excellent time to stay home and treat yourself, your family and your neighbors to a victory garden.

For additional information contact Bill Hoffman, Extension agent, agriculture and natural resources, at the Avery County Cooperative Extension Center, 828-733-8270 or wfhoffman@ncat.edu.

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