

Grow Kitchen Gardens  
By; Linda K. Schneider

Your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents probably had a kitchen garden; a small patch of land, near the kitchen door that gets planted each spring with vegetables, herbs, maybe a few edible flowers for color or cut flowers for the table. The location is as close to the kitchen as possible making accessibility the key. When the location is right, the cook will gladly step outdoors for a minute to pick fresh herbs or vegetables.

During World War II, countries asked their citizens to help in every way they could. Planting “Gardens for Victory” was encouraged. (As well as recycling, buying government bonds, conserving raw materials, and supporting the troops, etc.) In North America, millions of people in rural and urban communities planted Victory Gardens to grow their own food to feed their families, friends and neighbors, so the agricultural crops could be shipped to our troops abroad.

The French culture has been planting this type of garden for centuries, as far back as Medieval Times. They combine flowers and vegetables in their gardens. The French are much closer to their food sources than most Americans. Daily, they choose fresh baked bread from the bakery down the street, cheese from the market place, and picking herbs and salad vegetables from their own “potager” or kitchen garden.

The trend is growing in America. Gardening is now the number one hobby. One of life’s small pleasures is getting your hands in the dirt. Placing seeds in the warm earth and watching them grow, then harvesting the crop. Simple pleasures bring happiness and joy. *“An hour in the garden puts life’s problems in perspective.”*

If you are not convinced, here are a few more reasons why some people consider growing a kitchen garden.

Locally grown production of our food, keeps dollars in the local economy. Food that doesn’t have to travel saves fossil fuel and our dependence on other countries that produce it. Vegetables are fresher, tastier and contain more vitamins and minerals if grown locally because as they travel, they age and lose nutrients along the way. When they are picked fresh and eaten soon thereafter, these nutrients are more available for the body’s usage.

Buying local, gets you closer to the food you eat. Know where your food comes from and how it was grown. There is no better way to get closer to the food you eat than to grow it yourself! The foods in the grocery store have traveled long distances by ships, trains, and trucks. These are fueled by fossil fuels and fossil fuels make us dependent on foreign oil countries for our food. If you grew a small kitchen garden, you would be part of the solution in making this country less dependent on foreign oil.

Help to feed your own family, friends and neighbors. When there is extra, take it to the local food shelf in your community to help feed the poor or hungry. Some people purposely plant a row or two to share with the needy.

Cancer prevention is easier than curing cancer. Many known carcinogens are in some of the chemicals in food at the grocery store. Some pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers used in conventional farming are known carcinogens; that means they cause cancer. How do we combat this? Eat more organic fruits and vegetables. Don't like the price of organic items? Grow your own! It's simple, easy and cheaper than store bought and more rewarding to your soul.

Genetically modified foods (GMO's) are appearing in your grocery store, unlabeled as such. They look like fresh vegetables. The consumer can not distinguish between genetically modified foods and naturally grown foods unless you buy certified organic foods. Science is altering the genetic make up of our foods. We do not know what, if any problems these foods will cause down the road. Studies have not been done, but ten, twenty, thirty years from now, time will tell. If you wish to know for sure what your family is eating – grow it yourself. A simple quote comes to mind when thinking about genetically modified foods: *“Don't fool with mother nature!”*

What is organic? Organic means that vegetables or fruits were grown without man-made chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides. Organic farmers pay attention to their soil. They build and feed the soil using manure and other organic fertilizers. They start with organic seeds that are all natural, open pollinated (non-hybrids) and are GMO free (not genetically modified). Natural pest-control methods are used.

For healthy, happier lives; start small – grow a kitchen garden. *Self-reliance starts with being able to feed your family.* Put yourself in control. Nothing is more rewarding than walking out the back door just before sitting down to dinner to top off the casserole with freshly cut parsley or cutting mint for your iced tea. (The combination of fresh mint and lemon helps to release more vitamins and minerals into your blood stream.) *Self-satisfaction* is saying, “I grew this myself.”

Start small, plant just salad crops for your table; lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, peas, and herbs. (Make your own salad bar!). Consider growing organically; it's easier than you think. 1. Choose the site; location, convenience, plenty of sunshine, good drainage. 2. Prepare the area by building good soil; add compost or well aged manure. 3. Build a raised bed, optional. 4. Plant your family's favorite vegetables, herbs or fruits and berries.

Need help learning how to garden? Contact your local Conservation District for information and educational workshops. Or purchase a book on the subject, The Kitchen Garden Planner by Darrell Trout. For personalized help join your local garden club or stop in at your local garden supply centers.

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