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Victory in the Backyard: War Gardens in World War I



Teacher's guide:
grade levels 5–12

Number of class periods: 1

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Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.6: Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.RP.A.1: Analyze proportional relationships and use them to solve real-world and mathematical problems.

The Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal Street, New Orleans, LA 70130-2179

Contact Daphne L. Derven, curator of education, (504) 598-7154, daphned@hnoc.org
Jenny Schwartzberg, education coordinator, (504) 556-7661, jennifers@hnoc.org

Cover James Montgomery Flagg, *Will You Have a Part in Victory?* National War Garden Commission, ca. 1918, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZC4-10232).
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002712327/>.

A Note to Teachers: This activity set can be used as an individual resource or in combination with lecture, discussion, or writing assignments. Each activity set is designed to take between one and two hours of class time. Our hope is that these texts enable teachers to incorporate more primary sources in their teaching, suggest activities that focus on analysis and critical thinking, and provide new and exciting ways to bring history into the classroom.

Objectives

1. Students will examine images dealing with war gardens in the US during World War I in order to understand some of the ways the media was used to influence civilians during the war.
2. Students will use math to analyze aspects of planning, planting, and harvesting the bounty of war gardens.

Materials

Handout: "War Gardens in World War I"

Worksheet: "Planting Table"

Worksheet: "War Gardens in New Orleans"

Procedures

1. Distribute "War Gardens in World War I." Share-read the text.
2. Divide students into small groups to answer the questions on "War Gardens in World War I."
3. Distribute the "Planting Table" worksheet. Read over the introductory paragraphs with students.
4. Have students complete the "Planting Table" worksheet individually or in small groups.
5. Distribute the "War Gardens in New Orleans" worksheet. Read over the introductory paragraphs with students.
6. Have students complete the "War Gardens in New Orleans" worksheet individually or in small groups.

[Handout](#) [Share Read](#)

War Gardens in World War I

The United States' entry into World War I in April 1917 marked an enormous shift in the country's priorities. Now the bulk of the USA's resources, including its food supplies, were earmarked for troops fighting overseas and civilians living in war-torn areas. The price of meat, dairy products, and sugar quickly rose, and many of these foods became scarce.

Every pound of foodstuffs that can be spared for export will be needed in Europe for feeding American troops and to prevent the starvation of the domestic and military populations of the Allied Nations.¹

So how did Americans on the home front respond to these changes? By creating home gardens, conserving certain types of food, and encouraging sustainable food practices. Many families across the country began creating vegetable gardens in their backyards. These so-called war gardens allowed Americans to become less dependent on the availability of food in the grocery store. The United States War Garden Commission published pamphlets and instruction manuals to help families plant, care for, harvest, and preserve the food they grew in these gardens—and it worked!

In the United States the Commission's preliminary survey of war gardening in 1918 indicates an increase of more than 40 per cent over the number of gardens planted in 1917. The figures show approximately five million gardens with a probable value of half a billion dollars.²

War gardens became so popular that when World War I ended, in November 1918, many families continued to grow and preserve their own food. During the interwar period, these backyard gardens were renamed victory gardens—a name they retained throughout World War II.

The war gardener's responsibility, therefore, did not end with the coming of peace. His War Garden must now be made a Victory Garden in the full sense of the words. It must help solve the problem of feeding people rendered helpless by years of ruthless and terrible war.³

The following cartoons and posters were created to encourage Americans to participate in food conservation and creating war gardens. As you look at these images and respond to the corresponding prompts, think about how Americans on the home front during World War I participated in the war effort in a variety of ways.

1 *War Vegetable Gardening and the Home Storage of Vegetables* (Washington, DC: National War Garden Commission, 1918): 24. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t41r78r13>.

2 *The War Garden Guyed* (Washington, DC: National War Garden Commission, 1919): 2. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015067037500>.

3 *War Gardening and Home Storage of Vegetables for the Southern States* (Washington, DC: National War Garden Commission, 1919): 3. <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/WWIPamp/id/10963>.

The Days of Real Sport

“WAR gardening is just as good sport as golf or shooting,” declares an enthusiast. U-m, well, it requires as much skill and persistency to bag a patch of potatoes as to bag a dozen quail, and looking for the pepper plants in the weeds would be as good sport as looking for lost golf balls if caddies were employed to help.

Watchful Waiting

“This war garden business is a frost,” said the man in the street car. “I planted my garden two years ago and nothing came up but weeds. Last year I waited to see what would happen, but weeds were the only crop this time, too. I am going to wait just one more season, and then if the stuff don’t come up I am going to dig up the whole thing.”

GET BUSY! - - - - - By J. H. Cassel



CASSEL in *San Francisco Bulletin*.

Preliminary Practice

If you wish to do a little preparatory Red Cross work, why not hold very gently the blistered hand of your favorite war-gardener?

A Popular Tale

“What are you reading?”
 “A tale of buried treasure.”
 “Wasting your time on fiction?”
 “No. This is expert advice on how to plant potatoes.”



DAYLIGHT SAVED - A GARDEN MADE

Since Congress lengthened out the day,
 Let's start in right and stay right.
 It's just the thing for garden work—
 This extra hour of daylight.



WATER YOUR GARDEN CAREFULLY

“Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
 How does your garden fare?”
 “It's growing well in this dry spell;
 I water it with care.”

The sign in the cartoon “Get Busy!” reads:

Every potato bug is a Boche [negative slang term for a German soldier]

Weeds are German propaganda

Worms are U-boats [German submarines]

Woodchucks are pro-Germans

1. In your own words, restate the author’s message. Make sure to address the author’s use of figurative language.

2. Create your own caption for this cartoon.

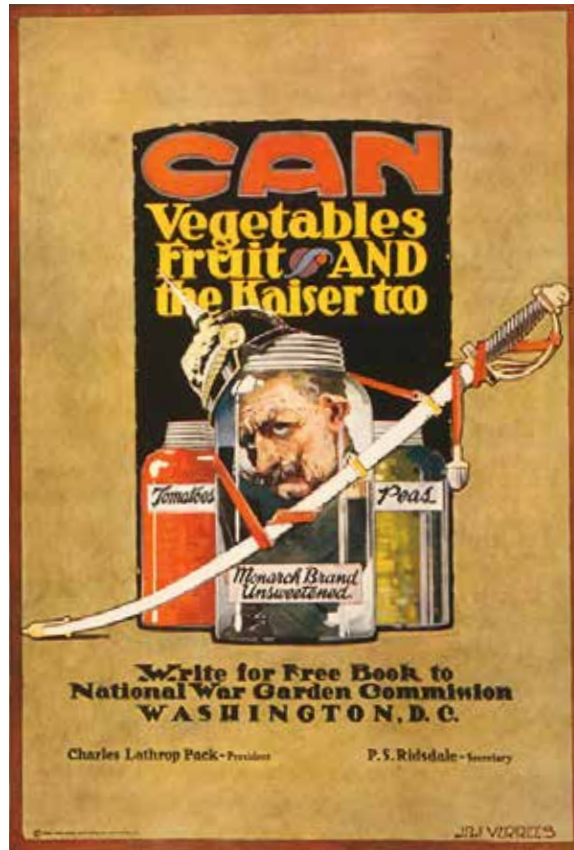


James Montgomery Flagg, *Will You Have a Part in Victory?* National War Garden Commission, ca. 1918, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZC4-10232). <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002712327/>.

1. How does the caption "Every Garden a Munition Plant" explain the image on this poster?

2. What does the text at the top of the poster ask the reader to do?

3. Analyze the image of the woman in this poster. What do you notice about her clothing, her actions, her posture, her facial expression, or any other details? What do you think those details are supposed to make the reader feel or think?



J. Paul Verrees, *Can Vegetables, Fruit, and the Kaiser Too*, National War Garden Commission, ca. 1918, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZC4-10671). <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003652822/>.

1. "The Kaiser" was the king of Germany. How is he portrayed in this poster, and why do you think the artist chose to portray him in this way?

2. How does this portrayal of canned food work to support the war effort?

Worksheet

Planting Table

Most of the families who wanted to plant a war garden were not farmers: they did not know how much seed to buy, when to plant, or how to take care of a garden. To help them, the US government published a manual with the basic information they needed. Below are some recommendations from the planting table in the 1918 National War Garden Commission book—the table tells families the quantity of seed required to plant a garden row 100 feet long, when they should plant the seeds, and how long it takes for the seeds to mature. Assume that a 100-foot-long row will feed one person for one year, and answer the questions below, using the table when necessary:

Crop	Quantity of seed required to plant a garden row 100 feet long	Time of planting	Maturity (in days)
beets	2 oz	April–July	60–80
carrots	1 oz	April–June	75–110
eggplant	2 oz	April and May	100–140
spinach	1 oz	September	30–60
tomatoes	$\frac{1}{8}$ oz	May and June	100–140
watermelon	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz	May	100–120

1. Anna wants to plant enough carrots to feed her family of four, and she wants the carrots to be ready for harvest in August. How many ounces of seed should she plant, and when should she plant them?

2. Ashley loves watermelon and wants to make sure that she'll have enough to feed her extended family of 30 people this year. She wants to be able to start serving it on the Fourth of July. How many ounces of watermelon seeds does she need, and what is the latest date that she can plant them?

3. The Delgados want to make sure that they'll have enough beets, eggplant, spinach, and tomatoes to feed their family of five this winter. How many ounces of each should they plant?

4. The Allards have a budget of \$25 to buy spinach and tomato seeds. Spinach seeds cost \$3.25 per ounce, and tomato seeds cost \$2.60 per ounce. If they buy four ounces of spinach seeds, how many ounces of tomato seeds can they buy, if they must buy only in whole ounces?

5. Jack, Gus, and Dennis bought a huge bag of mixed seeds. They know that $\frac{1}{5}$ of the seeds are carrot, $\frac{2}{5}$ of the seeds are tomato, and the rest are evenly split between spinach and eggplant. What proportion of the seeds in the bag are spinach seeds?

Teacher's Answer Sheet: "Planting Table" worksheet

1. Anna should plant 4 ounces of carrot seeds. Since carrots take at least 75 days to mature, Anna should plant the seeds in May, so that they'll be ready to harvest in August.
2. Ashley needs 15 ounces of watermelon seeds. The latest date that she can plant the seeds is March 26, since the seeds need at least 100 days to mature before July 4.
3. The Delgados should plant 10 ounces of beet seeds, 10 ounces of eggplant seeds, 5 ounces of spinach seeds, and $\frac{5}{8}$ of an ounce of tomato seeds.
4. The Allards can buy 4 ounces of tomato seeds. The four ounces of spinach seeds cost \$13, so their budget of \$25 leaves them \$12 left to buy tomato seeds. $\$12 \div \2.60 (per ounce of tomato seeds) = 4.6 ounces, or 4 whole ounces.
5. $\frac{1}{5}$ of the seeds in the bag are spinach seeds:

$$\frac{1}{5} + \frac{2}{5} = \frac{3}{5}$$

$$1 - \frac{3}{5} = \frac{2}{5}$$

$$\frac{2}{5} \div 2 = \frac{1}{5}$$

Worksheet

War Gardens in New Orleans

Many people in New Orleans created war gardens to provide food and support the war effort. Newspaper articles of the time demonstrate how central this effort was to life on the home front during World War I⁴:

The United States government has given a hint to the southern people that they must feed themselves. Our soldier boys are doing their bit “over there,” and it is up to us to do [our] bit “over here.” Our soldiers must be fed, our Allies must be fed. THE SOUTH HAS ALWAYS DEPENDED ON THE NORTH FOR FOOD AND FEED CROPS. As a patriotic duty, we should feed ourselves. The city people can help by producing something to [eat] in the home garden.

—Lewis H. Martin, “South Must Feed Self, Says U.S. Agent, Urging More Home Gardens”
[*New Orleans Item-Tribune* March 8, 1918]

A lot in New Orleans, which is allowed to grow up in weeds, with no attempt to make it produce something to eat, is known as a slacker lot. Have you such a lot? If so, why not put it into a garden immediately? If you are unable to cultivate the lot yourself, give it to one of your neighbors who is willing to plant a garden. New Orleans should not have one slacker lot this spring.

—“Slacker Lots’ Must Go, Say Leaders of Food Conservation” [*New Orleans Item-Tribune* March 10, 1918]

Have you planted a war garden? This is a simple, humble and unexciting way of showing your patriotism. The work of digging up a lot, buying seed and planting it does not seem half as thrilling as going “over the top,” or doing something else that insures fame and immortality. The worthwhile soldier or sailor, however, is a very hard-working man who does a great deal more disagreeable digging, scrubbing and pounding, under very much more disagreeable conditions than you would meet if you got out and fought bugs and mosquitoes in a potato patch. It takes initiative and energy to plan a garden, but once you have started to work the garden will develop. . . .

The war may last several years. Louisiana should be the most productive state in the Union, the great garden state of the Union. It would be interesting to see just what this state could do if its people were really organized to produce the maximum of food products from garden and field. We believe it could produce enough foodstuff to provide for at least ten millions of people.

—“Have You a War Garden?” [*New Orleans Item-Tribune* March 17, 1918]

When city folks become interested in farming to the extent of spading up their back yards and side lawns to grow potatoes, beans, beets and other vegetables, it indicates agricultural progress. It took war and food shortage and a serious appeal by the government for the South to feed itself [and] to make city people realize that their vacant 10 by 10 and 40 by 40 pieces of ground could be utilized in producing food. The movement has been so successful that it is probable the home gardening work will continue even after the war is brought to an end.

In New Orleans, where there are about 60,000 homes, it has been closely estimated that approximately 290 acres of land, comprising 11,000 individual gardens of average size 25 by 25 feet, were cultivated during the year 1917.

—R. G. Miller, “Wheels of Progress” [*New Orleans States* March 28, 1918]

⁴ The articles quoted here are collected in The Historic New Orleans Collection’s World War I Scrapbook 99-57-L. Original source and date information (reproduced here in brackets) comes from handwritten notes in the scrapbook.

The “Wheels of Progress” article quoted above congratulated the people of New Orleans on the success of their war gardens. The piece listed the most commonly planted fruits and vegetables, the yield of produce for the whole city, produce yield per household garden, and the monetary value of both yields. Fill in the blank spaces in the chart below to see how much food these war gardens produced for New Orleanians on the home front in 1917:

PRODUCT	TOTAL YIELD (from 11,000 gardens)	YIELD PER GARDEN	TOTAL VALUE (from 11,000 gardens)	VALUE PER GARDEN
sweet potatoes	11,000 bushels	1 bushel	\$16,500	
Irish potatoes	11,000 bushels	1 bushel	\$22,000	
beans	88,000 quarts		\$8,800	\$.80
cabbage	110,000 heads	10 heads		\$.50
beets	2,750 bushels	¼ bushel		\$.38
carrots	8,800 bushels		\$4,400	
eggplant		12 egg[plant]s		\$.60
cucumbers		½ dozen	\$550	\$.05
lettuce		20 heads	\$6,600	
okra		6 quarts	\$3,300	
mustard greens		10 heads		\$.30
spinach	2,200 bushels		\$2,200	
tomatoes	66,000 quarts			\$.30

Teacher's Answer Sheet: "War Gardens in New Orleans" worksheet

PRODUCT	TOTAL YIELD (from 11,000 gardens)	YIELD PER GARDEN	TOTAL VALUE (from 11,000 gardens)	VALUE PER GARDEN
sweet potatoes	11,000 bushels	1 bushel	\$16,500	\$1.50
Irish potatoes	11,000 bushels	1 bushel	\$22,000	\$2.00
beans	88,000 quarts	8 quarts	\$8,800	\$.80
cabbage	110,000 heads	10 heads	\$5,500	\$.50
beets	2,750 bushels	$\frac{1}{4}$ bushel	\$4,125	\$.38
carrots	8,800 bushels	8 bunches	\$4,400	\$.40
eggplant	132,000 egg[plant]s	12 egg[plant]s	\$6,600	\$.60
cucumbers	5,500 dozen	$\frac{1}{2}$ dozen	\$550	\$.05
lettuce	220,000 heads	20 heads	\$6,600	\$.60
okra	66,000 quarts	6 quarts	\$3,300	\$.30
mustard greens	110,000 heads	10 heads	\$3,300	\$.30
spinach	2,200 bushels	$\frac{1}{5}$ bushel	\$2,200	\$.20
tomatoes	11,000 gallons	6 quarts	\$3,300	\$.30