

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE U.S. Teaching Tips



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Youth will be able to:

- * Describe the different purposes that community gardens have served throughout U.S. history, and relate these purposes to historical trends.
- * Make a timeline that includes important historical and community gardening events in U.S. history.



HOW TO USE THE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE U.S. SCIENCE PAGE

Prior to introducing this topic to youth, you may wish to read the background information in the Educator's Manual entitled "History of Community Gardens in the U.S."

Ask youth: What are some of the purposes that community gardens serve today? List their ideas on newsprint as they brainstorm answers to this question. (Answer: Community gardens serve as sites for: exercise, enjoying beauty and quiet, playing cards and other games, carrying on cultural traditions, growing food and flowers, learning about food production, talking with friends, neighborhood parties, etc.) Explain that the main purpose of community gardens prior to World War II was to produce food but today community gardens serve many purposes.

Give youth time to read the front of the Science Page. Then start a discussion about community gardens during different periods of U.S. history. Explain that today food is more plentiful and readily available because of our modern food production and transportation systems. It may be difficult to imagine what it was like in the U.S. during the world wars and economic depressions, and why

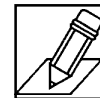
there was such a dire need for food.

Ask: Why do you think there was such a need to grow food in community gardens during World War I and II? (Answer: Resources of all kinds were being diverted to support national war efforts. The U.S. government asked citizens to help in every way that they could. People dutifully funded the war by purchasing bonds. They also conserved raw materials by recycling, and they grew food for their families, friends, and neighbors. Liberty Gardens during World War I and Victory Gardens during World War II successfully enabled more supplies to be shipped to American troops around the world.)

Ask: Do you think that community gardens in the U.S. actually produced enough food to make any difference to the war effort? Explain that huge amounts of food were produced in community and backyard gardens during World War I and II. As pointed out on the Science Page, by 1944, Victory Gardens produced 44% of fresh vegetables in the U.S. During World War I, the value of crops raised in gardens was \$350,000,000. People cultivated over 1 million acres of city and town land, much of which had been previously non-productive. Nationwide, people canned 460,000,000 quarts of vegetables and fruits. They also dried several million dollars of fruits and vegetables. (Source: Clarke, I.C. American Women in the World War. D. Appleton Co: NY, NY, 1918)

Ask: Do you think that growing food in community gardens actually helped people during economic depressions? Explain that the economic depressions involved bank, railroad, and other industry failures, widespread bankruptcies, and unemployment. Many people were without money and food. During the depression of the late 1800's, the mayor of

Detroit started the Potato Patch Movement. He asked landowners to donate their vacant land to the unemployed to grow food. It was hoped that gardening would give people financial independence and self-respect. Activities related to garden preparation, supervision, and upkeep cost the city of Detroit about \$3000. In the first year, crops worth \$12,000 were produced. Therefore, \$9,000 in relief expenditures had been saved for the taxpayers. In subsequent years, Buffalo, Minneapolis, Denver, and Chicago also had Potato Patch gardens. These community gardens helped the poor as well as taxpayers. (Source: Williamson, E.A. "A Deeper Ecology: Community Gardens in the Urban Environment," City Farmer. 2002 <<http://www.cityfarmer.org/erin.html>>



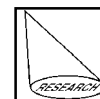
COMMUNITY GARDEN TIMELINE

Answers: from left to right, B, A, D, E, and C.



TRY THIS

Interested youth may want to research the history of community gardens in more depth. They can check out the article, "A Deeper Ecology: Community Gardens in the Urban Environment" by Erin Williamson, see reference above.



SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

The source for this information is Lee, S. H. "Community Gardening Benefits as Perceived among American-born and Immigrant Gardeners in San Jose, California." Berkeley University of California. Environmental Sciences 196. 2002 <<http://istsocrates.berkeley.edu/~es196/projects/2002final/Lee.S.pdf>>