

Be Victorious, Grow Some Food!

by Leigh Vincola

It seems that, thanks to Michelle Obama, Victory Gardens are back in style.

The original effort, a response to a scarce food supply during WWII was led by the U.S. government as a way to keep the country fed while funneling resources to the war effort overseas. It was a smart idea and it worked. Millions of Americans planted gardens wherever and however they could.

The war was won and there was victory. But shortly thereafter most Victory Gardens turned back into lawns and we started down the path to industrial farming and moved far, far away from the American idea of self-reliance.

This, in part, has led us to exactly where we are today: faced with a set of complex and often overwhelming challenges that need our immediate attention. Our food security, eating habits and national health are in serious trouble and digging ourselves out of this hole is the victory we need this time around.

And so I am encouraging you all to take part in the resurgence of Victory Gardens and grow something this summer. Plant something in the earth, water it, weed it, harvest it, cook it and eat it. If you've never done this before, now's your chance—no matter how large or small your garden may be. If you already fancy yourself a gardener, grow something new, grow a little bit more or learn to preserve the fruits of your bounty. One tomato plant, a couple peppers, a rosemary bush, a field of potatoes. It doesn't matter—every plant counts.

Granted, back in the '40s there was a little more physical space to work with—many city dwellers even had a lawn to tear up. In today's urban environments we're packed in pretty tightly, but this doesn't mean that we can't all grow something. We have pots, we have roofs, we have porches, city-owned plots, even the soil around the tree in front of your apartment. Use it. The Italians do, have for centuries. And while managing to keep pace with the modern world, Italy has possibly the most intact and well-respected food traditions in the world.

Time scarcity is another deterrent that often gets in the way of fulfilling activities like gardening. But right now, in this down economy, one thing we collectively have a little bit more of is time. Again, use it. I'm convinced that in order to move forward comfortably and sustainably, we need to adjust our habits to consume less and expect a greater degree of quality in all aspects of our lives.

Growing food is good. It's healthy. It's healing. It inspires us to nurture and take pride in our work. And it can only lead to better things: a greater appreciation of homegrown food, a passion for cooking, the improved health of ourselves and our planet and an overall admiration for the farmers who make this activity their life's work. Until you've prepared a meal with an ingredient that you've cared for and harvested yourself, you haven't fully experienced this goodness.

Maybe we'll get some governmental help with promotional posters, advertising campaigns and instruction to fuel the 2009 Victory Garden effort as in the 1940s. More likely, though, the Obamas' Victory Garden at the White House and a few Facebook-generated petitions may be all that we end up with. This is something, and I'll take it.

While there are similarities between today's crises and those of six decades ago, Victory Gardens have not reappeared simply in the name of winning a war. They're a response to a growing movement that addresses a laundry list of issues—everything from the floundering economy, to the loss of our communities, to serious health threats, to the disappearance of true taste, to an overdependence on fossil fuels, to a badly wounded planet.

In pursuit of fixing all of this and feeling positive about our future, I say: Grow some food this summer. Be victorious.

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