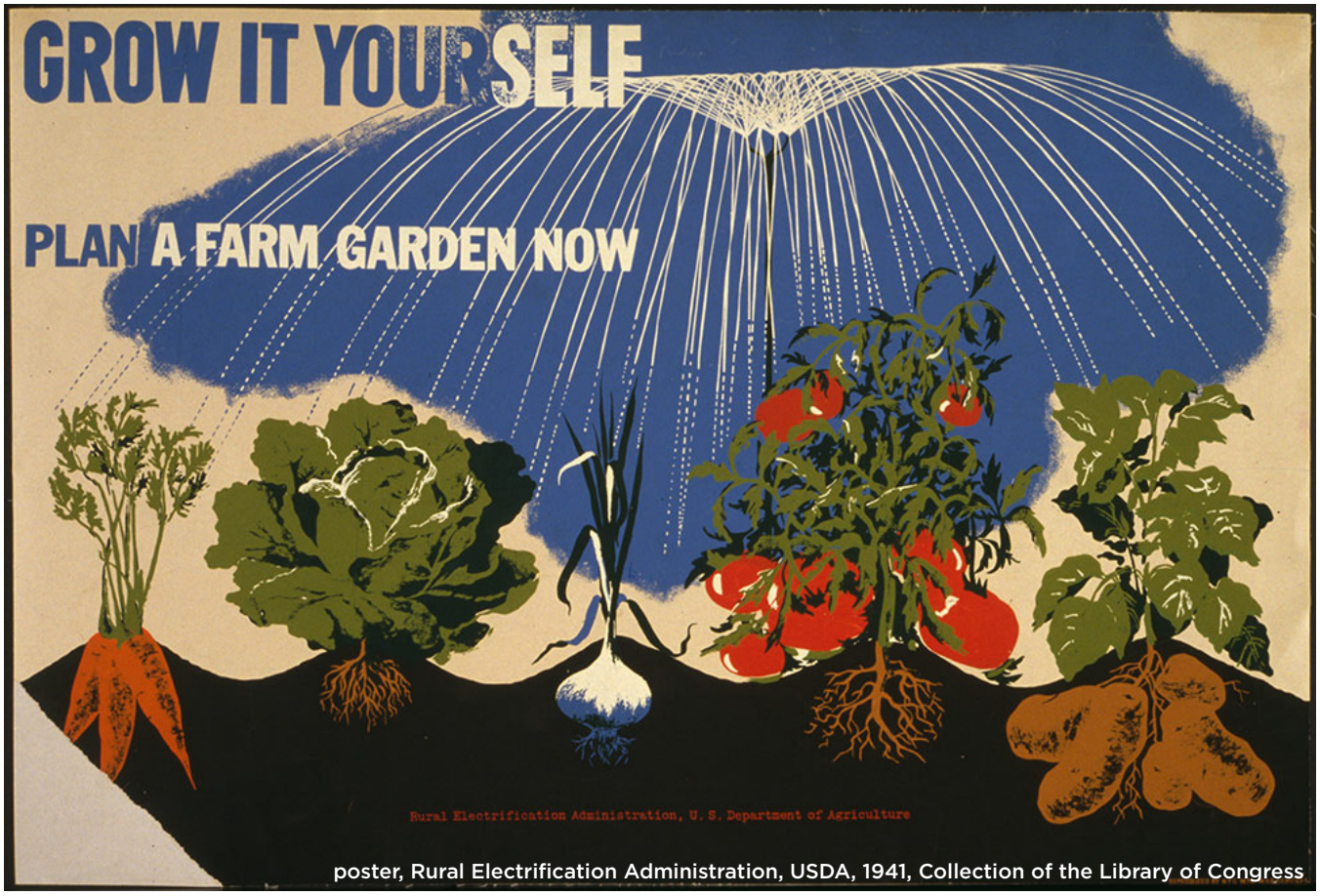

poster, Rural Electrification Administration, USDA, 1941, Collection of the Library of Congress

GROWING AS A COMMUNITY

Throughout history, our connection with the land has been an important part of the human experience, sustaining life and creating enjoyment. Native Americans and early settlers cleared and plowed the land, planting and tending to crops that would become food to feed their families. In South Carolina, early farming practices grew into an important agricultural lifestyle. For hundreds of years, South Carolina's economy relied heavily on crops such as rice, indigo, cotton and tobacco.

During the early 20th century, social and economic hardships throughout the United States necessitated the use of home gardens to supplement commercial food shortages. People came together as a community to grow vegetable gardens for subsistence, producing enough food to feed their families. Food grown in these gardens filled nutritional gaps created by government-issued rations, which closely regulated the amounts of food that could be bought and sold.

Today, environmentally conscious gardeners are growing plants for food using sustainable methods that leave a small ecological footprint. Collecting rain water to irrigate growing plants, eliminating the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and composting food scraps to nourish future plants are practices that ensure that the food we eat is safe, nutritious, and renewable.

Photograph of the "Win the War Colored Kitchen" of Florence during WWI

COMMUNITY GARDENS DURING WORLD WAR I AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In 1917, American involvement in World War I ushered in a time of great patriotic fervor. The United States called all men, women and children to arms, asking each person to do their part in the war effort. Government-issued posters became an important part of enlisting public support and participation. These domestic posters introduced the idea of the Victory Garden, showing Lady Liberty spreading seeds on fertile ground. This highly effective imagery called all citizens to grow and preserve food to feed themselves and the men serving in the military.

The National League for Woman's Service was a volunteer organization established to aid in war efforts on the home front during World War I. Through the efforts of Florence resident Jane Beverly Evans, the NLWS was chartered in South Carolina and branches were organized throughout the state. The Florence chapter of the NLWS led several initiatives including the operation of the Win the War Kitchen and the Win the War Colored Kitchen, the first one in the state. These educational kitchens provided instruction in nutrition, food preparation and preservation of homegrown vegetables. Women educated at the Win the War Kitchens were not only growing their own food in Victory Gardens, they were learning effective and efficient ways to prepare and store the foods they were producing.

After World War I, during the Great Depression, a six-acre community garden consisting of sweet potatoes and various other vegetables was planned in Florence. This garden was established to meet the needs of unemployed members of the community. Those who contributed to the upkeep of the community garden could reap the benefits of the vegetables it provided. Local children also did their part. The Florence chapter of the Boy Scouts of America contributed by collecting glass jars to be used in the home canning campaign. These jars would be distributed to farmers and gardeners to preserve their harvests for the winter months.

poster
J. Paul Verrees
1918, National War Garden Commission
Collection of the Library of Congress

poster
James Montgomery Flagg
1918, National War Garden Commission
Collection of the Library of Congress

poster
Stecher-Traung Lithograph Corporation
1939-1945
Collection of the Library of Congress

COMMUNITY GARDENS DURING WORLD WAR II

In 1942, as World War II became reality in the United States, vegetable gardening became a community responsibility. While many Florence men were serving in the military, other community members were serving their country by conserving resources, including food. By using available land in residential yards, families were able to grow their own food. Those who did not have access to land for gardening could apply to the Florence Chamber of Commerce for a small plot of land that could be used as a Victory Garden. Community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Junior Chamber of Commerce and Kiwanis Club supported the Victory Garden movement by holding an annual competition for the best Victory Garden.

Local school children became involved by pledging their support to vegetable gardening efforts. By 1943, the State Superintendent of Education, James A. Hope, had outlined a plan to include South Carolina school children in the Victory Garden food production program. Principals and teachers throughout the state were asked to use available school property to teach students the importance of growing their own food. The State Board of Health provided educational materials and garden plans to participating schools and individuals.

Florence businesses did their part to ensure the success of Victory Gardens and food production by making tools and supplies readily available. The Southern Cotton Oil Company mixed and sold fertilizer formulated for home Victory Gardens; Florence Seed Store sold vegetable seeds used to grow a plentiful harvest; Barringer Hardware Company sold gardening tools for preparing and maintaining a garden; and Sears Roebuck and Company sold home canning supplies used for food preservation. The easy availability of these products made it possible for individuals to do their part in food production and conservation.

LEARNING PARTS OF A PLANT

Materials:
Pencil, Paper, Crayons or Colored Pencils, Any plant (indoors or out)

Things to Think About:

- What are the parts of a plant that you can see? How do you think each of those parts is important to the plant? Do you think there are parts of the plant that you can't see? What could those be? Why can't you see them?
- Plants have lots of parts that help them to grow strong and healthy. Here are some of the parts you may find on plants near you:
  - **Roots**
    Roots provide support by anchoring the plant in the soil. Water and nutrients needed for growth travel from the soil through the roots and into the plant.
  - **Stem**
    The Stem is the support system of the plant, allowing it to reach the sunlight. The cells inside the stem carry water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves.
  - **Leaf**
    Leaves are the food factories of the plant. They capture sunlight used in the food-making process called photosynthesis. Through photosynthesis, the plant releases oxygen into the air, which we use to breathe.
  - **Flower**
    Flowers are the reproductive system of the plant and are important in making seeds. The petals of the flower attract pollinators such as bees and butterflies.
  - **Fruit**
    A plant's fruit is the product of fertilization. These fruits contain seeds needed to grow new plants. Many foods we know as vegetables are actually fruits. These include tomatoes, cucumbers, beans and squash.
  - **Seeds**
    Seeds contain a tiny plant embryo. Inside the seed is also food, which supplies energy for early growth. New seeds develop inside fruit.

TRY IT

- Find a plant in your yard, house, porch, or anywhere nearby. Look at it closely. What do you notice about the plant?
  - Does it have flowers? What color are they? What size?
  - Does it have leaves? What shape are the leaves? What color? How are they arranged on the plant? What are the leaves attached to?
  - Does your plant have one main stem, and/or lots of small stems?
  - Does your plant produce fruit? If so, what does it look like?
  - Is your plant producing seeds? If so, what do they look like?
- Using your paper and pencil, draw a horizontal line (a line laying down) about 1/3 from the bottom of your paper. This line will be the surface of the dirt that your plant is growing in.
- Draw the outline of your plant growing above the dirt. Make sure to look at your plant often. Add all the parts of your plant that you can see. This could include stem(s), leaves, flowers, fruit and/or seeds.
- Below your horizontal dirt line, draw what you think the root system of your plant looks like. If you know the name of the plant you are drawing, you could look up a photograph of the root system online.
- Label the parts of your plant

WATCH IT GROW

Materials:

Ziploc bag, paper towel, dried bean (lima or kidney beans work best), tape, window

Things to Think About:

- How does a seed grow into a plant? What comes first: Roots or Stems? What does a seed need to live? Water? Soil? Sunlight?

Try it:

- The day before you begin, soak a few dried beans in water overnight.
- Fold a paper towel so that it will fit into the Ziploc bag.
- Wet the paper towel so that it is saturated, but not dripping.
- Put the paper towel into the bag.
- Place 3 or 4 beans on the towel.
- Do not seal the bag! You don't want the paper towel to mildew.
- Tape the bag to your window with the bean facing the window.
- Each day discuss or keep a log of what is happening with your bean seeds. Include the following:
  - **Observe:** Look closely at your bean seeds. Notice any changes since the day before.
  - **Describe:** What does my bean seed look like? Are there roots? Stem? Leaves?
    Draw a sketch or take a photograph of your bean seed.
  - **Compare:** How is your bean seed different from yesterday? Is there new growth?
  - **Predict:** How do you think it will change tomorrow? What do you think will grow next? What will happen to the seed over time? How big do you think the plant will grow?