

UnFed: Creating Equality in our Food Systems



Growing Food At Home: Plant, Grow, Share a Row

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piAv2TRI960>

Fresh, Fresh, Fresh! This is what “organic” used to be! Being able to harvest food directly from your yard, deck, windowsill, or community garden means you are getting the healthiest and best-tasting food you can find. No travel time, no chemicals, and no plastic storage. Just freshness!

When you plant your own food, you know exactly what goes into the gardening process. You know the seed types you selected, where they came from and can make sure to create an organic garden to reduce the use of harmful chemicals. Nothing beats flavor and nutrient packed power of fresh-picked fruits and vegetables. Once harvested, produce begins to lose moisture and nutrients. At the grocery store, the freshness of your vegetables is out of your control. But when you’ve grown your own fruits and vegetables, you know exactly when they’ve been picked and how fresh they are. Good for you, your family, and the environment. Gardening is a fun way to keep the whole family healthy because kids are much more likely to be excited to eat the produce they helped grow! This will help everyone get more vitamins and minerals that are important to proper nutrition and good health.

Another advantage of growing your own food is that it can save you money. The price of a pack of seeds is almost equivalent to what you would pay for a single vegetable or fruit at the store. It may even cost less when you factor in the money spent on the gas used to drive to the store. Plus, you can grow organic vegetables for a fraction of the price. When taking food costs into consideration, gardening can become an appealing option to cut back on your grocery bill.

It’s Magic: Don’t miss this opportunity to synchronize with nature. Being a partner in the cycle of fruit production from seed is truly incredible. Bear witness to the relationships between the seed, sun, water, and soil and tune into wavelengths you didn’t realize existed.

When you take the time to prepare, plant, weed, water, and harvest your own garden, you are also getting sunshine, fresh air, and physical activity. The exercise you get can help you stay in shape, but also relax and de-stress. Because your garden needs to be tended, you are

guaranteed to have some active time each week outside, either on your own or with your family.

A vegetable and fruit garden can add life, color and beauty to your backyard. The smell of strawberries and the sight of cucumbers are a warm invitation to people and pollinators alike. Plants that have beautiful flowers encourage pollination—like beans, peas and fruit trees. Plus, the insects they attract will likely pollinate other plants as well, making your whole garden grow faster.

When you decide where to put your garden, keep in mind what plants may need. Do plants need a lot of sun or a lot of shade, or a little of both? Depends on what you're growing. Read the tag that comes with the plant or look up a gardening guide. Give plants the right amount of sun exposure they need to thrive. Also be careful not to place plants too close together. Follow the spacing instructions to allow the plants room to flourish fully.

For the more adventurous gardeners, *succession planting* is putting in small rows or beds of plants periodically during the growing season. As one planting's harvest begins to fade, the next planting's harvest will be ready. The key is knowing what vegetables can be planted in succession, and the best time of year to do it. *Companion planting* is a great way to maximize the efficiency of your garden. For almost every vegetable you grow there is likely to be a beneficial companion plant that will help increase soil nutrients, chase away pests, and help you get the most out of your garden.

Local Food System: If we can get back to WWII numbers, which was 40% of our nations produce from Victory Gardens, we would revolutionize the local food system. Victory gardens were started during the wars to promote the cultivation of available private lands to increase local food production which greatly reduced shipping costs and helped in the war effort. Even when not in times of war or crisis, homegrown tastes better, retains more nutrients, and is a more environmentally sustainable way to produce food. Home growing is major and an underrated part of our local food system. Today, only 26% of families have home gardens. Real Food Share has started a *1000 Garden Challenge*, where we are challenging 1000 people to plant gardens and let us know about it. Lots of good things come from growing your own! There is *huge* potential to shift the supply chain, solidify availability during times of crisis and create excess healthy food for neighbors in need.

What to think about before you plant:

- **Location:** Choose a sunny area, close to the kitchen, and near a water source. For crops to thrive, they ideally need a space on your property that has 6 or more hours of sunlight. Crops that you eat the leaf or root of (ex: beets, parsley, lettuce mix, radishes) can grow with less light, with 4 hours being sufficient. Plants that you eat the fruit of (ex: tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers) need their 6 hours.
- **What to Grow In:** Raised beds, containers or directly in the ground.
- **Soil:** Test your soil if you are direct sowing into the ground. Otherwise, make a plan of what soil you're going to get.

- **Determine Your Zone:** Connecticut is in Zone 6. Understand what grows best in this zone.
- **What to Grow?** Decide on what's important for you to grow, what are your priorities, what do you like to eat? What's fun?
- **How to Grow?** Will you grow directly from seeds or purchase started plants?
- **Be Ready as a Gardener!** Dedicate some time to it, there will be a bit of maintenance with weeding, mulching, and pruning.
- **Share!** Would you like to grow extra to donate/share? Please do!

Considerations:

- **The Beginning is Crucial:** Be prepared to take care of your little seeds, seedlings, and plants. The early stages of development are key to producing.
- **Pests and Diseases:** Consider starting your garden in a fenced-in area as you don't want to share your plants with the neighborhood deer or rabbits. Also, there will be bugs! Reach out to us or those at UConn extension to help you understand if they are beneficial for your plants or not.
- **Succession and Companion Planting:** Taking the next step in planning and learning which plants do well together and staggering plantings. For example, for companion planting - plant carrots underneath peas or kale next to potatoes or radishes to balance soil nutrients.
- **It's a Journey:** Trust that you will get better with experimenting and practice over time. "Black thumb" is a myth! Fun to try and see what works. Enjoy connecting with nature.
- **Starting with Easy Ones:** Tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, kale, culinary herbs, carrots and potatoes are good to try.
- **Ones We've Found Challenging:** Here are a few you might want to avoid in your first-year: broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, cabbage, and celery. But if you want to give it a go...plant 'em!

Resources:

Beginner Gardeners:

[Find your planting zone](#)

[1000 Garden Challenge](#)

[UConn Extension](#)

[Fruition Seeds](#)

The More Adventurous Gardener:

[Companion Planting](#)

[Succession Planting](#)

Soil testing:

[Logan Labs](#)

[Uconn](#)

Purchase your starter plants here:

[Shortts Farm](#)

[Gilberties](#)

Cool Apps to help you out along the way:

[Grow Veg](#)

[Sun Seeker](#)

If you can't garden at home join us here:

[Newtown's Victory Garden](#)

[Real Food Share](#)

