



Times-News

Victory Gardens and Green Homes

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David Weintraub

ECO NOTES



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During World War II, over 20 million Americans planted Victory Gardens to aid the war effort and assure themselves a steady source of food during a time of frequent shortages. Victory gardens were planted in backyards, rooftops, public spaces, vacant lots; wherever there was space and sun. It is estimated that 9-10 million tons of fruit and vegetables were produced by these gardens, 40% of American's food. Families and neighborhoods canned their own vegetables to save commercial canned goods for the troops. In 1943, families bought 315,000 pressure cookers for canning, a five-fold increase from the year before. Edible gardening became a family and community effort.

Victory Gardens helped to create a sense of community among neighbors. Gardeners with a surplus of food would wheel their goods around the neighborhood bartering for things they needed or exchanging them for ration stamps that were in short supply. In those days, people lived in communities, not in cul de sac subdivisions where many people live today. Relationships were valued over privacy and isolation. Victory Gardens are a great demonstration of the power of community and how, in hard times, anyone can live a sustainable lifestyle whether they live in an apartment or on a 3 acre lot.

As the war came to a close, the gardens disappeared. Vanishing as well was the self-reliance and pride many Americans felt. Today less than 1% of our food comes from our community with the average American meal traveling 1500 miles from farm to table, with lowered nutritional value, huge energy costs and tremendous environmental consequences. Agriculture changed post-war from a small family farm-based field to an industrially-based farming model with increased mechanization and widespread use of petro-chemicals.

Today with economic volatility a fact of life, the notion of becoming more sustainable is more important than ever. This year's Green Home Tour is not about showcasing overly large homes with expensive technology, but instead focuses on smaller local homes that make use of every inch of space to encourage self-reliance. On the tour this year, you'll see modest-sized homes that have turned small yards into bustling wonderlands of edible and medicinal plants. You'll also see older homes that have been made green through energy efficiency measures. You'll also see beautiful homes with beautiful gardens located in conservation subdivisions with walking trails, community gardens, and lots of room for socializing. Finally, the tour features a green school and drop-in workshops held all day at a green community center.

The original inhabitants of Henderson County, both the Cherokee and the European settlers, grew small backyard gardens and lived a sustainable lifestyle that limited their vulnerability to changes occurring nationally or globally. This year's Green Home Tour features homes that reflect the life of yesteryear, yet are equipped for the modern world.

No matter how the future unfolds, it is certain that self-reliance will be an important asset. To see how your neighbors are making some positive sustainable changes on a budget with healthy food at their doorstep, join ECO's Green Home Tour this Saturday, August 20th from 10-4 pm. To purchase your ticket, buy online at www.eco-wnc.org, call ECO at 692-0385 or visit the Hendersonville or Asheville Visitor's Centers or Wild Birds Unlimited in Hendersonville. As an added incentive, tour participants will receive special food deals at the Hendersonville Community Coop and Earthfare. Some beautiful, energy efficient homes, breathtaking gardens, walking trails and community gardens await you.

David Weintraub is Executive Director of ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, which is dedicated to protecting the mountain region's natural heritage. ECO can be reached at (828) 692-0385 or online at www.eco-wnc.org.