



Breaking Sod
– Starting the Garden

Hi Folks! I will be writing a series of articles and making videos about gardening this year from Breaking Sod to Harvesting the Garden.

The name Victory Garden came about during WWII. The war led to food insecurity and the rise of backyard vegetable gardens. It was a way for people to grow their own food, to be self-sufficient and to celebrate in their own resilient way.

See more about this history at <http://www.futurefarmers.com/victorygardens/history.html>

Today the Victory Garden is again a way for people to grow their own food and food for their communities. This is a way to combat the fear that Covid-19 will have an impact on food availability. Growing your own garden is a way to minimize any food insecurity that may arise and involve the whole family in a project. Youth will learn math and science growing a garden. Stretching, lifting, bending, digging and planting will give you a great work out. It helps your pocketbook, as seeds are much less expensive than buying produce. Then there is the bounty of the harvest, homegrown food is the freshest, healthiest and tastiest that there is. (Some of that elbow grease must improve the flavor.) Connecting with nature has been proven to have health benefits across the board, improving mood, attitude and the ability to focus.

So how to start? Ask yourself if you have the time and ability to grow a garden. If you have a site in mind, do a site assessment. Your spot should have a minimum of 6 hours of direct sun during the day. It should have good drainage and access to water. If you are an urban gardener, find out what lies below. Make sure there are no fiber optic lines or other obstacles beneath your spot. You might also want to check with the historical society to see what has been on your site in years gone by.

I also think a garden should be where it can be seen. By your walkway, out the kitchen window, somewhere where you are always looking is a great

spot. Not only will you want to keep your garden looking great, seeing it is a great reminder to check what can be harvested today.

- Make a list of the veggies you want to grow. Six tomato plants take more space than six basil plants. Knowing what you want to grow will help to determine the size.

- Decide what the objective is. Do you want to grow food for your table or do you want to grow food to serve on your table and to preserve?

- Make a map of where your plants will be in your garden. Be sure to incorporate companion planting concepts and the space needed for each plant.

I often recommend starting small the first year. A 10 ft. by 10 ft. is a good beginner size. Mark out the boundaries of your garden. You can use your garden hose to outline where the boundaries are and it can be a guide to start removing the sod.

Removing sod means digging out the grass and weeds that are growing in the area you are going to have as your garden. Sod is usually pretty tough stuff. For a smaller garden, I use a shovel, for a big garden, a rototiller. If using a shovel, skim the sod off about 3 inches deep, use it to fill in holes or low spots in your yard or compost it.

If using a tiller, rake up the clumps and use them the same way. Pick off bigger stones and keep them to one side for now. Dig the soil down a minimum of six inches and deeper if you can. Now is a good time to add amendments. Things like compost if you have it, well-rotted manure, last year's dead leaves and other organic materials can be added now and will help you have a successful garden.

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