Iowa State Promotes Gardens for Victory

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Iowa State Promotes

Gardens for Victory

Jo Ann Reeves discusses the program of the Horticulture Department in promoting victory gardens throughout Iowa.

Responding to the call for Food for Freedom, Iowa State is promoting victory gardens under the supervision of the Horticultural Extension Department. Previously the work of home economics students has been mainly concerned with preparation and preservation of foods, but a new kitchen gardening course has added production to this list.

Kitchen gardening is proving popular with home economics students, according to Professor E. C. Volz, who says that many of the students never have had gardens of their own. Each student has her own garden plot in which green and leafy vegetables, yellow vegetables and tomatoes are given emphasis because of their nutritive quality. In reference to their home gardens the students are urged to consider family needs and preferences and to provide vegetables for canning, freezing, drying and winter storage. They also are encouraged to space their planting so that the garden will yield vegetables from spring to late fall. Herbs and other flavoring vegetables have been added to the list of home-grown products.

The students who have taken kitchen gardening no longer believe that “a potato is a potato and they all taste alike.” An important part of the course is learning to recognize many varieties of potatoes, turnips, cabbage and other vegetables. Differences in flavor, tenderness, crispness and in baking quality also are observed in the class.

Other phases of gardening which are studied include garden planning, planting, management and control of pests. The students also learn how to prune fruit trees. Many of those who took the course are planning to have gardens of their own this summer and to help can and preserve food for their families’ use next winter.

Iowa has long been recognized as one of the country’s most active gardening states and has surpassed victory garden records of other states. The Iowa Federation of Garden Clubs and the Extension Service of Iowa State united in getting 83 percent of Iowa families to participate in the victory garden movement last year. An Extension Department survey showed that 96 percent of Iowa’s rural dwellers, 92 percent of townspeople and 70 percent of those who lived in cities produced gardens last year. In rural areas and towns with populations of less than 2,500 the county extension office was responsible for garden organization. In the 85 towns with more than 2,500 population the organizational work was under the direction of the Civilian Service Corps. The Extension Service was responsible for the educational phase in all sections. A community gardening committee was formed whose chairman was appointed by the Office of Civilian Defense. These chairmen in some cases were garden club members, greenhouse men or other experienced gardeners with some organization ability.

The first job of the committee is concerned with the problem of selling the community on gardening, procuring land and seeing that it is plowed.

Procuring land is a more difficult problem in the cities or towns with hilly, rocky land. Community gardens, located through real estate companies, the county recorder and newspaper publicity, may be public or may be private enterprises. In the latter case the land is plowed, divided into plots and rented by the owner.

Company gardens provide the biggest possibility for a sizeable increase in food production this year. Management has recognized the victory garden movement as being especially worthy of their cooperation and many have given large acreages to their employees for gardens. Often the lots are plowed and water is supplied by the company. In some cases seeds are supplied and tools are loaned. Interest is stimulated by contests among the employees of different departments and by exhibits and bulletin board displays.

In addition to the physical problems, the committee and extension director are concerned with promotion and education. The Iowa Garden Guide, published by the extension department is distributed by the block system, using officially appointed leaders, Boy Scouts, Campfire girls and seed and grocery stores and at meetings of women’s clubs. Pamphlets totaling 385,000 were distributed last year and by March, 1944, more than 300,000 copies of the new edition were in the hands of future gardeners.

Classes, conducted in the larger towns to give information to beginners, are taught by trained leaders. Professors from Iowa State’s Division of Agriculture taught a class in Des Moines for leaders this winter.

The National Victory Garden Institute has set a challenging goal of 22 million gardens for 1944, a ten percent increase over last year. The needs of 11 million men in our armed forces, our allies and conquered countries have increased our food requirements for the coming year. Because a man overseas needs an 18 month food reserve as compared to a six month reserve while in the United States, victory gardens have an even greater job to do this year.

Gardeners are more experienced this year and will not waste seed by planting large amounts of perishable products at one time. They have learned that rows of lettuce, Swiss chard and radishes 25 feet long supply far more than the average family will be able to consume. Even though they have only a small garden many gardeners will plant fruit because of decreased commercial supplies.