

Idaho Victory Garden: A vintage idea with modern appeal grows a wider audience

AT A GLANCE

Expansion of a popular, six-week course in growing, eating and preserving healthy food reaches over 163 individuals, meeting the needs of a new generation of gardeners.

The Situation

No longer simply a trend driven by economic recession, food gardening in the US is at the highest levels seen in more than a decade, according to a study just released by the National Gardening Association¹. When interest spiked to a thirty year high in 2008, one in five adults planned to grow a garden². In 2015, 42 million households (or one in three) are growing food at home, up 17% since 2008. Community gardening is up 200%. The most rapid growth in interest is among young adults and less affluent families.

What's driving this continued growth? Americans are spending over \$3.5 billion on food gardening supplies at garden centers. The health and social benefits of home and community gardening are well documented, but gardeners rate taste, economy, quality and safety of home grown food as most important.

Who's teaching them to be successful in their efforts? Gardening was traditionally a skill born of necessity, handed down through generations, but this is no longer the norm. Extension has the knowledge, skills and technology to fill this gap.

Our Response

The Idaho Victory Garden course was developed in 2009 to train individuals and families to successfully and economically plan, plant, harvest, cook and preserve safe and healthy vegetables, herbs and fruits in home and community gardens. Created by Extension

Idaho Victory Gardeners



Idaho Victory Garden program has taught over 500 Idahoans to plan, plant and harvest safe, healthy, homegrown produce.

Educator Ariel Agenbroad in Canyon County, the program has been very popular, enrolling over 339 individuals in the six week course. A University of Idaho Extension Critical Issues Grant was funded to expand the course to new locations in the state.

Three pilot courses were organized by faculty using Agenbroad's curriculum: Bonneville County (Idaho Falls) with Wayne Jones in 2014, Valley County (Cascade) with Melissa Hamilton and Washington County (Weiser) with Montessa Young in 2015.

Each pilot offered 6 interactive classes, 2-3 hours each, held evenings or weekends. A modest course materials fee covered costs.

The curriculum provided complete lesson plans, PowerPoint slide shows, hands-on activities and videos for each topic, provided in digital and hard copy to course instructors. A family resource notebook developed for participants included selected Extension

sion resources, the *Ball® Blue Book of Preserving*, and copies of the UI Extension bulletins *Planning an Idaho Vegetable Garden*, *Composting at Home*, and *Harvesting and Storing Fresh Garden Produce*.

Each course organizer utilized local speakers such as Idaho Master Gardeners and Master Food Safety Advisors, nearby Extension faculty and other subject matter experts. Each adjusted the course schedule to fit their participants' interests and preferences. Some key presentations (*Introduction to UI Extension Resources*, *Food Safety for Home Food Preservation*) were the same at each location.

An identical post course evaluation was completed by all participants the last night of class. A follow-up evaluation will be mailed to participants in early fall to measure how course information was used throughout the season.

Program Outcomes

The Idaho Victory Garden course resonated with audiences: 163 new individuals participated in the expanded course offerings. They varied in age, gender, and background, but shared common goals: to learn more about food gardening in Idaho, to improve or maximize their current efforts, and to help their families and/or communities become more self-sufficient.

Participants were enthusiastic about their experiences: *"Really enjoyed the class and am trying new things in the garden. I have gardened for many years...I really learned more than I thought I would."*

"Since we are new to Idaho in general – for us it was most helpful that you taught on what grows HERE – not in generalities."

"I loved sampling the foods and making the recipes. It was simple and...made me excited to grow and try this for my family."

Ninety-one percent of all participants evaluated planned to grow a garden following the course. If the average home garden can generate \$400-\$600 of produce, new Idaho Victory Garden graduates could grow \$81,500 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables grown this season!

The Idaho Victory Garden course reaches new and underserved audiences and connects them with Extension resources. Nearly two thirds of all participants went from having little or no awareness of, or interaction with, University of Idaho Extension to a moderate or high level by the end of classes.

One participant said it best: *"I didn't know what Extension could offer me."*

The Future

A peer-reviewed Idaho Victory Garden curriculum is being submitted for publication and statewide distribution. Work

is also nearly complete on an online, self-directed course to be hosted by extension.org.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Faculty Joey Peutz, Barb Abo, Surine Greenway, Lance Ellis; Idaho Master Gardeners, Idaho Master Food Safety Advisors, Trinity Lutheran Church, Trinity Community Gardens, Inc., (Nampa), Vendome Center (Weiser), St. Luke's Medical Center (McCall), Alpha Nursery and the Cascade Food Pantry (Cascade).

References

¹National Gardening Association. (2015). Garden to Table: A 5-Year Look at Food Gardening in America. Accessed at <http://assoc.garden.org/press>

²National Gardening Association. (2009). The Impact of Home and Community Gardening in America. Accessed at www.garden.org

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