

When Homesteading Was Patriotic

The other day, I was surfing around [Pinterest](#) and came across some really cool posters from WWII (World War 2). They were all about farming, raising chickens and pigs, planting more beans, and having victory gardens. Homesteading was patriotic, or at least the raising of chickens, pigs, and growing food was patriotic. I admit I used to think “victory gardens” were what you planted after a huge disaster but I now understand their history and purpose. I just have to wonder why we stopped doing it and how come the pendulum has swung so incredibly far the other way?



Not sure what a victory garden is? According to the [article on Wikipedia.com](#):

“Victory gardens, also called war gardens or food gardens for defense, were vegetable, fruit, and herb gardens planted at private residences and public parks in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Germany during

World War I and World War II. They were used along with Rationing Stamps and Cards to reduce pressure on the public food supply. Besides indirectly aiding the war effort, these gardens were also considered a civil “morale booster” in that gardeners could feel empowered by their contribution of labor and rewarded by the produce grown. This made victory gardens a part of daily life on the home front.”

If you didn't know about such practices, you aren't alone. There was once a time when the country actually encouraged people to be more self-reliant, self-sustainable, and take care of themselves. In our current global market and economic situation, you would think that they would encourage us to be like this again...or never stopped encouraging us in the first place! The war commission put out these posters that targeted absolutely everyone from babies to adults to “do their part by making sure they ate everything on their plate and growing their own food instead of relying on the government.” I was reading an article the other day about things Americans do that are considered rude in other places. Eating everything on your plate was one of them. Given the little history lesson I have just taken on victory gardens, I understand why this is a ‘normal’ practice in our country.



Americans were on rations back then, largely due to the food we were sending to allied troops. Growing food was taught in schools with a hands on approach by the students tending the school's vegetable garden. Preservation of food was also highly encouraged by canning in tins or jars.

People were asked to plant more beans, raise chickens, and [propaganda for children to join the “pig club”](#) was put out. Along with that, posters saying “Uncle Sam Expects You to Keep Hens and Raise Chickens” were put out during World War I. It

went on to read:

“Even the smallest back yard has room for a flock large enough to supply the house with eggs...An interested child, old enough to take a little responsibility, can care of a few fowls as well as a grown person...Every back yard in the United States should contribute its share to a bumper crop of poultry and eggs in 1918.”



Can you imagine them trying to do something like that today? The outcry would be loud enough to be heard in the Southern Hemisphere. How about [comic books](#) with Superman, Batman, and Robin in their ‘victory garden?’ What do you think the reaction would be if the United States Government decided to put posters out [showing kids gardening](#) with the message, “We eat because we work. We belong to the U.S. School Garden Army” ??

The entire perspective and production methods of food has changed. Our relationship with food is also almost a 180 degree turn. Where local and federal governments once encouraged and even helped teach people for free with booklets and other resources, now they issue arrest warrants for people growing lettuce on the greenbelt in front of their house (that they are responsible for maintaining, even though they don’t technically own it). How about those who are fined for collecting rainwater for their gardens? In Florida, it has been deemed “illegal” to live off the grid: you have to at least be hooked up to municipal utilities, even if you don’t use them. [When did independence become illegal?](#)



When I ask myself why, the first answer is a tie between money and control. Americans have been turned into consumers, not producers. Big Agriculture and Corporations care more about money and keeping you buying their pre-made, pre-packaged “food product.” They don’t want you to know how to pressure can your own green beans or water bath can your pickles. They replace real food with chemical fillers or alter the real food in such a way as our body isn’t sure what to do with it (think margarine).

At the risk of sounding hoity toity or snobby, maybe even a wee bit paranoid, I think it is completely possible that someday *any* food grown outside the control of some company or government will be considered unsafe, inedible, and the practice of growing or raising your own food sources will be deemed illegal. For our safety, of course. I hope I am wrong but there are already signs of such things on the horizon. Think I am bonkers? Ask yourself how people would react if you took your front yard and made it a vegetable garden with chickens on the side. Are there already rules in place prohibiting such actions? I have learned, unfortunately, that this is already the case in numerous places across the country.

To quote one of my favorite urban gardeners, Ron Finley, “When you grow food, it’s like printing your own money.” And he is right. If you think about it, the initial investment to get the garden going (which can be done in [containers AND on a budget](#)), the return can continue indefinitely! Most people live in a ‘food desert,’ meaning all of their fresh produce is trucked in from miles, sometimes hundreds or thousands of miles at that, away before it hits your plate. Those costs raise the prices. Trust me, I know. No joke when I tell you it

is, on average, \$4.99 a pound for tomatoes.

Patriotism means different things to different people. The government once considered self sufficiency patriotic. Now, with so many people who rely on food stamps to feed their family, the situation is even worse. To stretch those dollars, they end up buying the pre-packaged and processed foods. Been there, done that and I understand. What *doesn't* make sense to me is why the government doesn't institute a program similar to the victory gardens to help ease the crunch on the system while also promoting healthier and more active lifestyles?

Why indeed.

