



FEED Kearsarge Presents

VICTORY GARDEN TOOLKIT

Lessons from growing
food in community



By:

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on behalf of FEED Kearsarge
& Kearsarge Community Network

In partnership with
UNH Cooperative Extension
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Picture 1.3 Container Garden

"Last year I grew wonderful veggies and herbs in containers and sent up my gratitude with every delicious bite! Please know that you provide a comforting presence to all of us in need of that extra layer of kindness and dependability that good neighbors are known for."
~Home Gardener

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **Section 1: Toolkit Overview**
 - **1a:** What are Victory Gardens
 - **1b:** About the Creators
 - **1c:** About the Toolkit
- **Section 2: How to Start the Garden**
 - **2a:** Garden Design: Containers & Raised Beds
 - **2b:** Distributing Seedlings: the Tray it Forward Model
 - **2c:** Community Sites: Process & Resources
- **Section 3: How to Keep the Garden Going**
 - **3a:** Newsletters database: Growing guidance from June through August
 - **3b:** How to: YouTube video series & guides
 - **3b:** Community building in the garden
- **Section 4: Program Evaluation**
 - **4a:** Case Studies: Warner Connects, Bradford Food Pantry, & Colby-Sayer College
 - **4b:** Challenges, Successes and Recommendations
- **Section 5: Partners & Thanks**

1a WHAT ARE VICTORY GARDENS?

In WWII, victory gardens popped up in homes across the nation to grow more food when supply chains were unstable.

Victory gardens also spread throughout communities as a way to grow as much food as possible, typically then donated through food pantries.



Picture 1.1 Victory Garden tour at Colby Sawyer College

Traditionally, victory gardens are a way to increase food security for homes and communities in times of scarcity. Today, we're all feeling the impacts of inflation, the rising cost of living, and unstable supply chains. Victory Gardens provide creative solutions to feed communities and create meaningful change. Programs modeled after victory gardens can not only increase food security, but can also help to share knowledge and foster community connections and individual wellbeing.

History & Application

[Community Gardens: Growing more than just food](#)

[Community Garden Spotlight: A New space at River Valley Community College](#)

[In Meg's Garden](#)



1b ABOUT THE CREATORS



Picture 1.2 Victory Garden partners gather at the Warner Food Pantry victory garden.

FEED Kearsarge

FEED (Food Expansion, Education, Distribution) Kearsarge is a partnership of local organizations working to advance food security and food sovereignty for all in the Kearsarge Region/Lake Sunapee region.

Sparked in the spring of 2020, this initiative brings together various voices, perspectives, and skill sets needed to find community-wide solutions to build community, share knowledge, and cultivate JOY while getting fresh, healthy local foods to neighbors needing a hand.

Partners of FEED Kearsarge include:

Kearsarge Food Hub • Spring Ledge Farm • Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners • Colby Sawyer College • Bradford Food Pantry • Main Street Warner • Warner Public Market • Warner Connects • New London Hospital • New London Food Pantry

[Learn more about FEED Kearsarge](#)

This toolkit came about from a group of community partners dedicated to openly sharing information and resources around how to grow more food, gardens, and gardeners in the Kearsarge Region of central New Hampshire. We hope the tools presented here help other communities consider and develop similar programs to meet their own food security and community building needs.

Kearsarge Community Network (KCN)

The FEED Kearsarge initiative also takes place in the context of a larger community-wide network, the Kearsarge Community Network (KCN). KCN was developed with support from a UNH Extension grant project. The goal is to bring together local partners from nonprofit organizations, civic groups, towns, schools, and businesses in the Kearsarge area. We collaborate on activities, programs, and events that cultivate resiliency and wellness skills.

UNH Cooperative Extension

In the fall of 2020, the UNH Cooperative Extension started working on a grant project to build community resilience in the Kearsarge Region. This resulted in the ongoing work of the Kearsarge Community Network. **This toolkit is funded by the USDA through the UNH Cooperative Extension.**

1c ABOUT THE TOOLKIT



Picture 1.2 Victory Garden construction at the Bradford Food Pantry. Bradford, NH

This toolkit was created to help people start more gardens at home and in community! It includes information and insights co-created, gleaned, and tested by community partners across sectors that have been working to grow more gardens and get more fresh local foods into the kitchens of neighbors.

Who's it for?

- Community groups and/or locations looking to start a community garden. The examples we cite from our experience are: food pantries, schools, and universities.
- Homesteads and homes looking to start a raised bed or container garden.
- As we're gardening in New Hampshire, the specifics of growing food in this toolkit relate to plants that thrive in the Northeast United States or similar climates.

Purpose

- Grow and distribute more food to feed neighbors.
- Build community connections and sense of belonging for neighbors.
- Inspire more folks to grow food at home.
- Share gardening education to reclaim knowledge of how to grow food.
- Inspire folks to eat more fresh fruits and veggies.
- Bring joy and a sense of wellbeing through connections to soil, seasons, and the source of our food.

2a GARDEN DESIGN

Containers

For many home gardeners or community sites, land access might be one of the biggest barriers to growing food.

Container gardening is a way to explore growing food in small spaces - you might be surprised by how much you can grow in containers!



Picture 2.1 Vegetables and herbs growing happily in containers

The basics of container gardening

Using containers to successfully grow a variety of vegetables is not difficult. Often, this alternative to in-ground or permanent, raised-bed gardening offers gardeners a method that is highly adaptive and easily controlled, especially for those folks who live in rental properties or who do not have the means (or space) to establish a permanent in-ground garden.

There are six things to consider when planning your vegetable container garden: **(1) pot type & size, (2) drainage, (3) sun exposure, (4) soil composition, (5) plant requirements, and (6) plant food for optimal growth.**



[Container Gardening Overview](#)

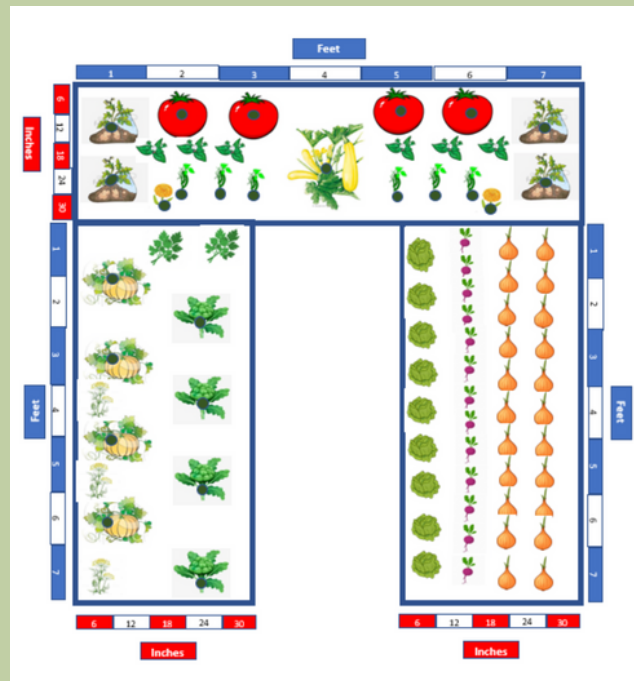


Section 2: How to start the garden

2a GARDEN DESIGN

Raised beds

There are many advantages of raised beds in a small garden. The soil in raised beds becomes deeper and more productive over time as you add compost and mulch every season. The beds keep your soil concentrated in one place and avoid erosion and compaction. In early spring, the soil in the raised beds tends to warm up faster.



Picture 2.2 Raised bed garden design



Raised Bed Garden Design

2b **DISTRIBUTING SEEDLINGS**



Picture 2.3 Tray delivery day, 2021

The Tray it Forward Model

When encouraging more gardens in community, you may want to consider how to get people started with seedlings. Providing neighbors with free seedlings is one way to address the cost barrier to starting a garden - and it can be a fun way to create partnerships amongst community partners while building a sense of connection.

The Tray it Forward Model was developed by FEED Kearsarge partners as a way to get free seedlings to homes and community garden sites, followed by gardening education and program evaluation.

Tray it Forward Steps - A High Level View

- **Collaborate with partners:** Tray it forward starts with planning amongst community partners, including: local farms and/or garden centers, volunteer coordinators, food pantries, food hubs, churches, and other businesses, nonprofits, or civic/social welfare groups.
- **Project planning & management:** Months before seedlings can be distributed, partners meet and plan the logistics of growing seedlings, signing people up to receive them, and seedling distribution. This phase is about establishing communication, creating a timeline, and assigning roles.
- **Growing the Seedlings:** A local garden center or farm grows the seedlings for this project. Customers and community members sponsor the trays at checkout. What the seedling trays contain can be flexible. Trays of 12 and 24 plants are options, with a mix of common vegetables, herbs, and beneficial flowers.



2b **DISTRIBUTING SEEDLINGS**

Tray it Forward Steps - A High Level View

- **Registration:** Build an online form for people to sign up for seedlings. Promote the form and project via advertisement, direct communications with possible clients via food pantries, welfare offices, hospitals, schools, and whoever else can help get the word out.
- **Providing additional gardening materials:** Providing additional resources like compost and garden tools can support gardening success. These can be purchased or be donated by local businesses.
- **Seedling distribution:** Tray delivery day consists of volunteers loading up and dropping off seedlings to registrants. Could also look like registrants picking up their seedlings at a designated location.
- **Post-distribution gardening education and community building:** Gardening newsletters, Facebook support groups, and developing fun programs like garden superlatives with prizes can help build community amongst gardeners.
- **Program evaluation:** Conduct a survey to assess the program and integrate feedback into planning for the following year.

Tray it Forward Review: 2022 Participant Suggestions

1. On-site visits to participants' gardens for further instruction and/or Victory Garden Workshop offerings
2. Container gardening kits for porches or patios as some participants noted that rental properties often do not have access to garden plots.
3. Limited access to computers for some individuals so provide the option of mailing in registration forms.

Section 2: How to start the garden

2b DISTRIBUTING SEEDLINGS

Samples Tray it Forward Project Materials

[Registration Form](#)

[Tray Design & Plants](#)

[Program Survey](#)



FEED Kearsarge
Food • Expansion • Education • Distribution

Victory Garden Revival
“Growing your own food is like printing your own money.”

TRAY IT FORWARD

FREE GARDEN IN A TRAY!
For anyone struggling with food insecurity in the Kearsarge/Lake Sunapee region. Take advantage of this great program!

Vegetables and Herbs in 2 Sizes
Small tray - 12 plants | Large tray - 24 plants

Call or visit the website below to register!
<https://knpnh.org/feed-2022/>

1st Annual Tray it Forward: 2020



2nd Annual Tray it Forward: 2021



3rd Annual Tray it Forward: 2022



Victory Garden Toolkit

2c **COMMUNITY SITES**

Process

To developing gardens at community sites like food pantries or schools, follow these steps:

1. **Select victory garden partners and site:** Who needs to be involved? Where will the garden be?
2. **Develop Garden Design:** What's the purpose of the garden? Is it about growing as much food as possible? Gardening education? Community building? This will help hone in on garden site and design.
3. **Source and Fund Building Material:** Identify funding needs and sources.
4. **Determine Approval Process:** Ensure the garden can be built at the location you choose.
5. **Garden Installation:** Assign roles and build the garden.
6. **Garden Creation and Management:** Garden maintenance and harvest are critical to the ongoing success of the garden.
7. **Education & community building:** Garden tours, educational workshops, and other events at the community sites can provide additional support and community connections.

Resources

[Sample: Warner Connects Community Garden](#)

[Victory Garden Project Plan Template](#)



Picture 2.4 **Community Garden at Warner Connects Food Pantry**

3a **NEWSLETTER DATABASE**



Picture 3.1 Colby-Sawyer College
Victory Garden

Growing guidance from June through August

Sending weekly email newsletters throughout the growing season can provide real-time updates and information on how to make the most of your garden.

*Note: these gardening tips are for climates similar to the Northeast United States

Week 1: Starting the garden

Week 2: Building healthy soil

Week 3: Fertilizing the garden

Week 4: All about tomatoes

Week 5: Common garden pests

Week 6: Pollinators in the garden

Week 7: Edible weeds

Week 8: Beneficial insects

Week 9: When & how to harvest

Week 10: What weeds can tell us

Week 11: Planning for next year with cover crops

Week 12: Benefits of perennials

Section 3: How to keep the garden going

3b HOW TO: VIDEOS & GUIDES

Videos

How to add compost



All about tomatoes



Eat your weeds



Help pollinators



Guides

Comprehensive Guide to starting the Garden



All about pollinators



All about edible weeds



Section 3: How to keep the garden going

3c COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE GARDEN

Victory gardens provide an opportunity to not only increase food security through growing more food and sharing gardening information, but they're also a great way to build community connections.

Community connections foster individual and collective wellbeing. These connections nourish neighbors and build community resiliency!



Picture 3.2 Victory Garden at the Bradford Food Pantry

FEED Kearsarge Presents:

Victory Garden Superlatives!

Post a picture in each category by Friday that week in our Victory Garden Support Group on Facebook.

Prizes from Spring Ledge Farm, Sweet Beet Market + Café and Warner Public Market will be awarded each week!

Save the Dates & Play Along!

July 11th	Most Creative Garden Set up
July 18th	Very Curious Critter
July 25th	Most Vibrant Flower
August 1st	Coollest Cucumber
August 8th	Rainbow Meal
August 15th	Most Unique Plant

Join the Victory Garden Support Group:
bit.ly/Garden_Support_Group

There are many ways to build community through victory garden sites, including:

- Conducting garden tours
- Hosting a Facebook Support Group
- Running fun programs like Victory Garden Superlatives help get folks excited about gardening!
- How else can you build community in the garden?

Sample: Victory
Support Group

4a COMMUNITY GARDEN CASE STUDIES

Warner Food Pantry

At the Warner Connects garden, Amelia Gardner of Farmsteads of New England tends the beds along with other volunteer support. She says “**Every garden is an opportunity for learning**”. So, even if you’re not feeding the whole community with the garden, the opportunity for learning ripples out. There is no such thing as failing in the garden, Amelia believes. Only learning.



Picture 4.1 Amelia Gardner of Farmsteads of New England gives a tour of the Warner Connects Victory Gardens.

The Warner Connects Garden provides space to Tray it Forward recipients to garden, participates in the Abenaki Seeds Project (another collaborative initiative to grow heritage Abenaki seeds for the Native American community), and produces food for the pantry. With the goal of producing a steady of food for pantry clients, they’ve been focusing on radishes, which are quick to grow and can have several harvests throughout the season. Though they have had to trouble shoot with the very dry summer, mulching the beds seems to have helped.

The Warner Connects food pantry is open 4 days a week and is a very active food pantry. Having a garden here has proven to be quite the educational tool. Folks come and walk around the gardens, either experiencing them for the first time or, being gardeners themselves, are looking for inspiration or bringing questions. One thing they’ve noted would be helpful in guiding clients would be to have an experienced farmer or gardeners there during busy times to help answer questions.

The takeaway: Community garden sites provide more than just food. They are also a place for learning and connection!

4a COMMUNITY GARDEN CASE STUDIES

Bradford Food Pantry

The Bradford Food Pantry Victory Garden has been through a trial and error process over the past three years in figuring out exactly what to plant to have a successful growing season.

In the past few years, we've experimented with up to a dozen different kinds of plants in the space, all from the Tray it Forward program, which has proven to be too many in this small space.



Picture 4.2 Victory Garden at the Bradford Food Pantry

Laura, who manages the food pantry, along with Cheryl from the partnering church, has decided that **fewer varieties of plants will be better for this small space.**

Garden volunteer Patty is checking on the garden weekly and sending produce to the community FREEdge at Sweet Beet, a free fridge resource for folks to access 24/7.

Though this garden doesn't produce a high volume of food, the goal is for it to **support pantry clients with fresh veggies they will actually use.** Having the garden right outside the pantry creates greater exposure to gardening for clients who use the pantry, and a source of joy for friends and neighbors that drive down main street who get to enjoy the garden's beauty.

The takeaway: Fewer varieties of crops at smaller food pantry gardens, with a focus on foods that pantry clients will actually use, helps to make the most of the space.

4a COMMUNITY GARDEN CASE STUDIES

Colby-Sawyer College

At the Colby-Sawyer Victory Garden, they have developed a clear understanding of the purpose of their garden, which has helped to create a successful, dynamic program. Students plant seedlings from the Tray it Forward Program as well as the Abenaki Seeds Project as a hands-on learning experience in the areas of growing food and supporting food security.



Picture 4.3 Professor Leon Malan gives a tour at the Colby-Sawyer College Victory Gardens.

They donate the harvest to either the food pantry there in town or the Abenaki Helping Abenaki food pantry. As part of the environmental science department, Professor Leon Malan, who is an experienced farmer, oversees and manages the space. He's able to work with his students, troubleshoot any problems in the garden, and maintain relationships with the folks at the food pantries.

Beyond the garden, Professor Malan's interns have also engaged in the summer gardening education that supports home gardeners from the Tray it Forward Program and throughout the community with ongoing gardening information. The interns send out weekly gardening from June through August focusing on different themes, including soil health, common pests, and how to harvest. They also manage the Victory Garden Facebook support group and Victory Garden superlatives to help build a sense of community for all gardeners.

The takeaway: While some community gardens at sites like food pantries may lack farmer support to have a successful growing season, a college garden that's integrated into existing studies around food and farming has a lot of potential for learning, growing, and succeeding in the garden!

4b CHALLENGES, SUCCESSES, RECOMMENDATIONS

CHALLENGES

1. Defining garden purpose and finding a fitting location based on that purpose.
2. Clear role definition: Engaging dedicated, enthusiastic participants and garden managers.
3. Tracking and measuring the success of different victory garden efforts.

SUCCESSES

1. Building active, working relationships amongst partners across sectors.
2. Connecting neighbors around the joy and celebration of growing gardens.
3. Testing methods of reclaiming and sharing knowledge about how to grow food.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a multi-channel communications strategy for sharing this toolkit.
2. Hone in on logistical aspects, systems, and project management of building and growing victory gardens.
3. Create a process for updating this toolkit as new information, lessons, and processes are developed.



Picture 4.4 Building soil at the Colby-Sawyer College Victory Garden



Picture 4.6 Kiddos help plant the garden at the Bradford Food Pantry

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VICTORY GARDEN TOOLKIT

Lessons from growing
food in community

Thank you for checking out the toolkit! We hope it inspires you to garden and supports more community gardening everywhere. Check out these partners who helped bring all of these materials to life for more information.

Partners & Contact Info

Kearsarge Food Hub

Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners

Colby-Sawyer College

Kearsarge Community Network

Spring Ledge Farm

Warner Connects Food Pantry

Kearsarge/Lake Sunapee Food Pantry

Bradford Food pantry

UNH Cooperative Extension

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