

# Delawareans fight inflation with home gardens

NEWARK, Del. - Delawareans are finding that a home vegetable garden can be a welcome buffer against today's rising food costs. Though it would be hard to get a handle on the number of gardens planted around the state this Summer, there's no doubt that growing one's own produce has become a very popular—and often profitable—hobby.

Dr. Willie G. Adams, Extension garden and home improvement agent working out of Delaware State College, has been sharing his expertise with about 25 home gardeners in the Dover area this Summer in a special program sponsored by the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service. He also lends a hand with a number of community-type gardens and feels most of these food growing efforts have been quite successful.

His clients include retired couples trying to manage on a fixed income, as well as suburban families who've discovered that a home vegetable plot can be a relaxing hobby as well as a way to cut down on trips to the grocery store. Besides the fresh fruits and vegetables they enjoy over the growing season, many of these enterprising people will also be eating their fill of canned or frozen home-grown produce this Winter.

Belasco ("Jack") Bossard is probably typical of many of today's suburban vegetable gardeners. He lives in one of the comfortable developments that have sprung up, recently around Dover. Bossard, a career counselor for the Capital School District, says it all started a few years ago when his wife suggested they grow some tomatoes in a small strip of vacant land at the back of their lawn.

Every year the strip gets wider as the family tackles a greater variety of crops. This summer was their biggest effort yet, with onions, cabbage, lettuce, snap beans, limas, squash, cukes, peas, sweet peppers, collards, mustard, sweet and white potatoes, okra, sweet corn, melons, radishes and—

of course--tomatoes. Bossard's 12- and 16-year-old sons are in charge of weed control. He shares a rototiller with a friend for turning the ground over at the beginning of the growing season.

To find out what and how to plant, since he'd never done any gardening like this before, Bossard consulted with Adams. He also began exchanging ideas with a neighbor who has had some experience at growing vegetables. And he started reading up on the subject.

Like many other beginners, he learned the hard way not to overplant, and sticks to those vegetables the family likes to eat. He's found out, too, that giving the excess away isn't always as easy as you might think. "People can be pretty choosy—even about hand outs," he notes wryly.

With a freezer full of homegrown food, Bossard says the family has gotten far more from their garden than they ever dreamed they would. "I figure we've had a return on our investment four, five or even six times over," he says.

If you're retired, a productive vegetable garden can be of particular value in combating rising food costs, as many folks have discovered. A large, well-managed plot can yield enough to drastically reduce the number of trips you have to make to the grocery store over the year—especially if you preserve what you can't eat fresh.

Mr. and Mrs. James Thomas have been growing and preserving their own vegetables for the past 50 years, so retirement means they have more time to care for their half-acre plot just north of Dover. There they "fight the battle of weeds and bugs" side by side—with the help of an old International Harvester Super-A Farmall. During the growing season, you're likely to find James Thomas out cultivating part of the plot with this in the early morning, while his wife Lulu is inside fixing breakfast. At harvesttime, they work

together to can the abundant yields.

Their flourishing garden boasts a remarkable assortment of fruit and vegetables, including sweet corn, yellow squash, zucchini, vegetable soybeans, lima beans, onions, okra, tomatoes, two kinds of peas,

two kinds of grapes, cucumbers, watermelons, lettuce, cabbage, castor beans, and gourds. Mr. Thomas also has a pumpkin patch and hopes to grow a 400 pound pumpkin one of these days. They also raise chickens for their own meat.

Another successful

Delaware vegetable gardener is Pat Saunders. Pat lives in Wyoming, in a comfortable frame house she's renovated with the aid of lots of helpful advice from extension agent Adams.

With his help, she's also been instrumental in con-

verting the large vacant lot next door into a successful community garden that produces enough to feed her and half of the neighborhood. Since early spring the lot has yielded a succession of crops that would make many a novice gardener green with

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