



### **Come Shop with Us!**

The Haddam Garden Club's Annual Plant Sale will be held Saturday, May 13 from 8 until noon, just in time for Mother's Day. Come shop with us in front of HES. Once again, our friends at Bartlett Tree Service will answer your questions and give away free Dogwood tree seedlings. We're your source for great plants at unbeatable prices!

### **Farming to Win**

May begins with a rush to plant as the last frost is finally behind us, and ends with Memorial Day, commemorating the patriots who sacrificed themselves for our country. I think home-front patriotism deserves a mention, too. Some of us may have heard of victory gardens, but we have largely forgotten the important roles farms, gardening and food management played as part of the strategy to win the two great wars of the twentieth century.

Each war placed enormous stress on the nation's food supplies. Massive harvests were needed to feed our own troops and to send to overseas allies, whose agricultural lands were combat zones and whose supply chains were broken. But just as the need peaked, labor became scarce, as farmers went to war or opted for high-paying jobs in war industries. In England— at especially high risk of starvation, since German blockades were sinking Allied relief ships—the government's response was to create a Women's Land Army, enlisting young women to replace the largely male agricultural workforce. The U.S. was hesitant to follow suit (especially in the West and South); the Women's Land Army of America in World War I was a wholly private organization, with funding and training mostly provided by women's colleges and organizations. The estimated 20,000 young women who participated were mockingly referred to as "farmerettes," derisively linking them to the suffragette movement, and many, including President Woodrow Wilson, doubted their ability to manage the heavy work. But the farmerettes had the last laugh: they proved their worth, and a few years after the war ended, won the vote.

The Second World War brought lingering skepticism, but attitudes had to change. On Farm Mobilization Day in 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized the critical need for women to step in to fill the loss of millions of farm laborer jobs. This time around, the Women's Land Army became an official government program, part of the U.S. Crop Corps. Formal training programs were created—one of the first was at the University of Connecticut—so even city girls could learn the necessary skills. The former farmerettes were as essential to the war effort as Rosie the Riveter.

Even with millions of women joining the farm labor force, food shortages were an ever-present concern. Rationing helped, but wasn't enough to relieve the pressure. Just a generation or two earlier, every family had tended its own vegetable plot as a matter of course, but with a more industrialized economy, larger urban population, and ready availability of canned food, home gardens became less common. They were resurrected as "Victory Gardens" using any and every scrap of vacant land--everything from Boston Common to the space running alongside railroad tracks. Part of the reasoning was that farmers-turned-urban munitions workers would willingly grow vegetables too, if a plot could be provided nearby. Teenagers and even schoolchildren were recruited into "Victory Farm Volunteers." It worked: even with the loss of millions of farm workers, food production increased by almost one-third.

The more I learn about farm-related messages during wartime, the more I'm struck by how similar so much of it is to today's efforts to change and improve the American relationship with food. Wartime posters reminded citizens that home-grown or locally purchased food didn't have to travel to get to their tables, saving gallons of precious gasoline. One poster distributed from the Hartford office of the U.S. Food Administration urged folk to "Be Loyal to Connecticut!" by buying Connecticut-grown potatoes. Our "shop local" movement similarly directs consumers to hometown markets, albeit in the name of reducing carbon footprints instead of freeing fuel for military use. Wartime propaganda urged women to can or otherwise preserve fresh food. Home canning meant garden-grown produce could be enjoyed long after the harvest, helping to eke out otherwise skimpy meals, and it makes sense whether the skimpiness is due to rationing or just a tight budget. In 1916 or 1943, eating less meat was an act of patriotism. Today, it's a choice made for health reasons, or to ease the pressure on an overpopulated planet.

Whatever your reasons, get out there and grow something. Imagine yourself part of the Greatest Generation, pitching in on the home front, fighting the enemy with a shovel and watering can. How fortunate we are that, today, our foes are mostly in the shape of woodchucks, raccoons and hungry deer.