

SEEDS THAT FEED

Seeds that Feed distributes free garden seeds and gardening information directly to food pantry recipients. The aim is to increase the amount of fresh vegetables grown in home and community gardens and help people reap the many benefits of food gardening.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The idea is simple and is a perfect project for Master Gardeners, 4H groups, high school FFA classes, or other groups. The general idea follows these steps:

- Seeds are acquired, sorted, and displayed at food pantries in the spring and early summer. Depending on the climate, seeds for cool weather vegetables can be offered again in the late summer to encourage fall gardening.
- Basic gardening information is also gathered and displayed along with the seeds.
- Displays are set up and staffed during pantry hours in order to provide assistance to people with gardening questions. People generally like the chance to ask questions and talk about their gardens.
- Unstaffed displays can also be created as long as they are restocked on a regular basis.

WHERE TO FIND SEEDS?

- Ideally, new seeds will be purchased in bulk and repackaged. This may take a bit of time and cost a little bit of money, but the quality and selection of new seed will be much better than donated seed. Bulk seed prices are very reasonable and starting with fresh seed will help increase gardeners' chances of success. Check Morgan County Seeds for options and prices (18761 Kelsay Road, Barnett, Missouri 65011-3009, 573-378-2655, or on the internet).
- Old seeds may be acquired through a variety of sources. In the late summer or early fall of each year, requests for unsold vegetable garden seed can be made at hardware stores, local seed dealers, and other places in

the community. Also, seed companies including Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company, Seed Savers Exchange, Johnny's Select Seeds, and others have seed donation programs.

- Local churches can sponsor a seed drive for new or left-over seeds or money to purchase seeds. Public libraries may also be good partners.
- Regardless of whether new or old seed is collected, be sure to store it in a cool, dry location until it is distributed. Air tight jars, plastic tubs, and popcorn tins make good containers.



An example of a Seeds that Feed distribution table.

- When working with old seed, keep in mind that not all donated seed may be worth keeping. Consider doing a germination test on the seeds or consulting a seed viability chart to learn which varieties don't keep well. Discard anything that germinates poorly or is out of date.

WHAT ABOUT GARDENING INFORMATION?

The Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security Grow Well Missouri project has created a variety short, reader-friendly educational fliers to promote basic and more advanced gardening skills. Please contact Bill McKelvey at mckelveywa@missouri.edu or 573-882-4973 for more information.

The Cooperative Extension System (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>) is another source of reliable information. Found in every state in the U.S., Extension offers a wealth of resources on gardening, food preservation, cooking, health, and nutrition. Check with your local office to see what might be available. Most states also provide their information for free on the internet.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE?

Don't stop with seeds and a few handouts. There are a number of things that can be done to give people a greater chance of gardening success.

- Create a monthly newsletter or blog. Seasonal tips, recipes, and gardening advice can be compiled and distributed at the food pantry on a regular basis.
- Distribute vegetable transplants. Consider working with a local nursery, high school agriculture class, or hobby greenhouse growers to acquire donated or purchased vegetable transplants. In the spring, cabbage and a variety of greens make good choices. In the summer, tomatoes, peppers, and sweet potato slips can be distributed. Start small and consider

making an announcement prior to the date you plan to distribute plants. Also consider taking orders for transplants to help gauge the amount needed.

- Help start a community garden. Creating a community garden at the food pantry or nearby can be a great way to bring the community together. Community gardens provide gardening space for those who may not be able to have a garden at their home and give new gardeners a chance to learn from experienced gardeners. They also provide a space for hands on workshops and demonstrations, and a source of fresh produce for the food pantry!
- Provide container gardening resources. For a variety of reasons, people may choose to grow their vegetables and herbs in containers. Consider offering all the necessary materials to help people get started. Look for bulk sources of potting mix, plastic pots, natural fertilizer, and transplants. Container gardening is also a great way to introduce children to the joys of gardening.
- Host gardening classes, workshops, or special events. Poll food pantry participants and community members to see if there is interest in holding classes or workshops. A special event, like a tomato festival or harvest festival, is a fun way to celebrate and provide some gardening instruction. Consider holding the event during regular pantry hours.

A host of other resources to help you get started – including cost estimates, a materials list, seed labels, and educational materials – are available by contacting Bill McKelvey, mckelveywa@missouri.edu, 573-882-4973.



Interdisciplinary Center
for Food Security