

POWER^{UP} YOUR PANTRY

Go Local! Series

Help people grow their own, the Grow Well Missouri way



Grow Well Missouri is a program of the University of Missouri that started in 2013. The goal is simple – To help food pantry clients grow more of their own food and reap the many benefits of gardening.

How does it work?

The most successful Grow Well Missouri programs usually involve a partnership between a food pantry and another, local organization. Master Gardeners and Garden Clubs make great partners, along with 4H groups, high school FFA classes, health departments, and others.

The basic idea is simple:

- Seeds are acquired, sorted, and displayed at food pantries during food distributions in the spring and early summer. Seeds for cool weather vegetables can be offered again in the late summer to encourage fall gardening.
- Basic gardening information is gathered and displayed along with the seeds.
- Displays are set up and staffed by people with some gardening experience in order to provide one-on-one assistance. This personal touch goes a long way to helping people gain the confidence to give gardening a try.
- Unstaffed displays can also be created as long as they are maintained and 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 can be very reasonable. Also, 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).



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This series is intended for food pantries and other hunger relief groups looking for ways to enhance their current operations and better meet the needs of people who use their services.

The information provided is based on survey and other research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security at the University of Missouri.

IF YOU DECIDE TO USE NEW SEED...

please contact Bill McKelvey, Project Coordinator, University of Missouri, at mckelveywa@missouri.edu or 573-882-4973 for more information. He can provide detailed templates and instructions for estimating the amount of supplies you'll need and how to print labels and repackage the seeds.

If you plan to seek donations of old seed, consider these options:

- 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 in the summer for left-over seeds.
- 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 more than three years old.

Regardless of whether new or old seed is collected, be sure to store it in a cool, dry location until it is distributed. Seeds are best stored at 50 degrees Fahrenheit and 50% humidity, but some places that does not get too hot and is relatively dry will work. Air tight jars, plastic tubs, and popcorn tins make good containers. If you are able, add a desiccant packet to the bottom of the container to absorb moisture.

How to display seeds?

There are a number of options available for displaying seeds. For the do-it-yourselfers, consider making your own from the tops of photocopier paper boxes. Shallow plastic tubs with dividers also work, along with baseball card storage boxes (see below). Some groups have been able to reuse the seed displays found at hardware stores or other retail businesses.



What about educational materials?

Grow Well Missouri has a variety of reader-friendly educational materials on the Grow Well Missouri Resources page, including the full color, 16 page booklet The Garden Starter.

Also, found in most U.S. states, Cooperative 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 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. Consider setting up a free standing or wall mounted literature display to collect and share information.

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.

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. They also give new gardeners a chance to learn from experienced gardeners and provide a space for hands on workshops, demonstrations, and a source of fresh produce for the food pantry. **Check out our Community Gardening guide** foodsecurity.missouri.edu/power-up/ for more information.

Partner with farmers and gardeners. Consider putting the word out to local farmers and gardeners that the food pantry is willing, able, and grateful for donations of fresh, locally grown produce. **Check out our Partnering with Farmers and Gardeners guide** at foodsecurity.missouri.edu/power-up/ for more information.

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.

Finally, have fun with whatever type of gardening activity you promote. Gardening can be a positive part of people's lives, bringing good food and sense of satisfaction to the entire community.



FOR MORE INFORMATION and to access educational materials, see the Grow Well Missouri home page at <http://foodsecurity.missouri.edu/projects/grow-well-missouri/>.



For more information:
foodsecurity.missouri.edu