

A Word From the Watershed: Nehalem Native Nursery

By Corrie Aiuto

The Nehalem Native Nursery, primarily used to grow native tree seedlings and plants for riparian restoration work, is now growing vegetable starts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspired by the Victory Gardens grown across the United States during World War I and II, the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council (UNWC) hopes to develop the nursery into a viable resource to fight food insecurity in our community.

The UNWC has been growing native plants for restoration work since the beginning in 1996, but did not always have their own nursery. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was an essential partner, providing grant funds, surplus seedlings, pots and soil, and facilitating nursery development and operation. Eventually satellite nurseries sprung up around our region resulting in the Nehalem Native Nursery here in Vernonia.

Located north of the Vernonia Schools on Texas Avenue, the nursery program was adopted by Vernonia School District 47J and funded by BLM Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) grants, a U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife grant and capacity support for

UNWC operations provided by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). The Vernonia Forestry Class and UNWC have used the space to grow and teach plant production for the past several years.

public land to grow food crops to help ease the strain on the agriculture industry and prevent starvation. These spaces were known as "Victory Gardens," and during WW II there were as many as 18 million such gardens across the nation which produced an estimated 8 to 9 million tons of fruits and vegetables.

To be clear, growing vegetable starts is a new venture for the UNWC. Although well versed in production of native trees and shrubs for riparian restoration, Maggie, UNWC staff, and volunteers have never operated the nursery to produce vegetable starts in a way that sustains the nursery and is beneficial to the community.

"This is a new endeavor, and we are excited about it, but it's going to take time," Maggie explains. "Nurseries are a lot of work and we are going to have to develop a sustainable plan and then work out the kinks."



Summer Squash



Artichoke

Once Oregon initiated the Stay Home, Save Lives order to slow the spread of COVID-19, Maggie Peyton, UNWC Executive Director, said she was inspired by the Victory Gardens during WW I and II.

"I just decided to plant some vegetable seeds," Maggie says. "We were out there in the nursery, social distanced and potting native seedlings in the fresh air and sunshine and I thought, 'We could fill this greenhouse with veggie starts for the community.' Then the Community Garden folks donated some seeds and asked to use some space in the greenhouse and it all just seemed like a timely productive idea."

During the first and second World Wars, the United States encouraged the use of private and

PLANT STARTS AVAILABLE

The good news is vegetable starts are now available at the Nehalem Native Nursery! Located at 1201 Texas Avenue, Vernonia, the starts are offered by donation (suggested donation \$2 each). **If you need starts and cannot afford to donate, please come anyway. Our main goal is to provide a resource to the food insecure in our community.** Not pictured: dill, cilantro, broccoli, heirloom tomatoes and zucchini, luffa, turnips, beets, sunflowers, watermelon, pumpkin, lettuce, and Oregon Oak tree starts (but don't eat those). We also accept donations of seeds, heirloom varieties preferred. More seeds are being planted so more varieties will be available as we move through the summer season into winter crops.

A key element of success has been the involvement of volunteers. Since nurseries are so labor intensive and funding so tight, the UNWC cannot afford to pay employees to do all that is needed. Volunteers step in and make the magic happen. Would you like to come help in the Nehalem Native Nursery to grow food for the community? If you want to volunteer and/or obtain veggie starts please contact Maggie at (503) 396-2046, maggie@nehalem.org or visit our website at unwc.nehalem.org.

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