

A Growing Practice

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One local company is bringing back Victory Gardens, grassroots community contributions and hope—one garden at a time.



In the darkest days of World War II, backyard Victory Gardens gave Americans a sense of self-reliance and hope. Now, in our days of gloomy Recession Gardens, Sustainably Yours Garden Management (SYGM) is putting a positive new spin on that same old idea.

"We don't live in defeat here in America," says Quintin Eason, SYGM founder and sustainability coach. That's why this Phoenix-based company is bringing back Victory Gardens—with a twist. SYGM is a green garden and landscape company that offers sustainable and eco-friendly products and services like organic compost, seeds, sustainability coaching and garden design and planting. It strives to help local families, businesses and organizations embrace an organic lifestyle that will endure long after this economic downturn.

The idea has come a long way. A Mississippi native, Eason moved to Arizona in 2001 to work as a chef and a buyer/coordinator for Whole Foods, but he grew concerned with what he saw. The average American meal travels 1,500 miles from farm to store shelf to table, losing nutrients and risking contamination along the way. Canned vegetables contain hundreds of milligrams of sodium and few nutritional benefits. "The consumer has no idea what they're getting and they don't know where it's coming from," Eason says.

Determined to change the way Americans eat, Eason and friend Bobby Smith founded Sustainably Yours in January 2009. The duo salvaged and restored a 1971 Ford F100 into a fuel-efficient "eco-truck," adopted a 1970 tiller belonging to Eason's grandfather, acquired reclaimed garden tools and recycled wine barrels, and polished their sustainability coaching skills. The company was ready to fulfill its "passion to feed people."

In February, SYGM became Arizona's official advocate for the national "Plant a Row for the Hungry" campaign. This movement encourages farmers and gardeners to plant an extra row of fruits, vegetables or herbs and to donate this surplus produce to a food bank. To raise awareness, SYGM donated three "Kitchen Gardens"—wine barrel halves filled with organic compost and seedlings—to Phoenix's St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance on Earth Day. Originally the world's first food bank, St. Mary's now serves 13 of Arizona's 15 counties, providing about 60 million meals a year. Still, demand has skyrocketed 80 percent in the past year, says Beverly Damore, director of community relations. And, like most food banks, it lacks fresh, healthy food.

However, SYGM's "dirty donations" can produce a 45-day supply of nutritious produce worth \$1,500, says Bobby Smith, SYGM proprietor and sustainability coach. They also inspire people to try their own hand at gardening. "Not only do we distribute food, but we also like to help people enable themselves in order to get food," Damore says.

Eason sets out this fall to visit regional schools and businesses, explaining how "they can use their idle land to produce healthy vegetables for people in need." He is also seeking state funding to convert empty municipal lots into gardens to benefit the community.

SYGM hopes you too will welcome back sustainable Victory Gardens. They save money, reduce waste, enhance diet, and help solve pressing environmental problems. Best of all, they're easy to maintain and your produce will satisfy your family and give hope to those it's donated to.

The National Gardening Association says 43 million American households are tending their own gardens this season—a 19 percent increase from 2008. But Arizonans are lucky: Eason says veggies can thrive year-round here. With a little care, commitment and vision, you can create something wonderful with your own hands. Just ask Sustainably Yours.

To Learn More:

Sustainably Yours Garden Management, 602.292.3377, www.sustainablyyou.com.

St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance, 602.242.3663, www.firstfoodbank.org.