

# Growing for *Sharing*



Communities across the state are growing produce to share with others! Both home and community gardens are contributing their produce to food pantries and other areas of community need. In our years growing and donating at the Worland Community Garden we have learned what produce is most helpful to our community organizations. We'd like to share these tips for growing produce to donate with you!

## The Worland Community Garden

There are many goals a gardener might have, either at home or in a community garden. For the Worland Community Garden, founded in 2015, the primary goal is to grow and distribute vegetables to members of the community who have limited access to fresh food. The secondary goal is to provide learning opportunities for youth and adults.

The garden is managed through the Washakie County Extension office and is funded by private donations. The AmeriCorps program contributes labor. The garden is one-third of an acre in size and uses no-till and low input gardening practices. All the

produce is shared with local organizations and families who can benefit from the extra fresh food and nutrition. Recipients include the local food pantry, senior center, residential and day facilities for adults with disabilities and two crisis centers. The Worland Community Garden set a record in 2021 with over 3,700 pounds of vegetables grown and shared with the community!

## What we have learned

In the quest to grow large quantities of nutritious food with minimal effort and increase fresh vegetable consumption, we have learned a few things:

1. Grow what people are familiar with. It is fun to experiment, and a few people love kohlrabi and eggplant, but nearly everyone loves fresh tomatoes and carrots.
2. Grow nutritious and relatively expensive vegetables. For example, potatoes and onions are less expensive and are easier to fit in a grocery budget than garlic and green beans. So, your efforts growing green beans and garlic may be of more

benefit to community organizations.

3. Select productive, compact, and disease resistant varieties. Variety selection is important when trying to maximize the amount of food produced in compact spaces without fungicides or other pest treatments. Spend a few dollars on quality seed and avoid the colorful racks of cheap seed at the big box stores.
4. Stagger planting dates and choose varieties to spread out harvest over a longer season.

If you are trying to maximize food production, choose crops and varieties that match your growing season and conditions. Worland has a longer growing season than some areas in the state and very intense summer heat. Cucumbers were always a challenge until we started growing 'Muncher Cucumbers'. This variety has done very well for us as they don't get bitter and are quite productive.

Winter squash is a great crop to share. It is productive, nutritious and easy to cook. We choose bush or semi-bush varieties to save space, and prefer butternut,

The success of the Worland community garden inspired the Grow a Little Extra program (part of the Wyoming Hunger Initiative) and influenced the crops and varieties selected for the seed packets it distributes. The Wyoming Hunger Initiative had great success in the first year of the Grow a Little Extra program with over 10,000 pounds of produce grown and shared by home gardeners! With a small investment in seeds and time, you too can join in growing food to share.

buttercup and kabocha varieties for their rich flavor. Acorn squash is also a good option; more people know how to prepare it and there are some very compact varieties. There are also some true giants that will feed large families or groups like the 'Pennsylvania Dutch' and 'Banana Squash' (up to 40 pounds each).

For summer squash we prefer zucchini over the yellow crookneck or pattypan. An oversized zucchini can be used to make breads, but the crookneck and pattypan varieties get tough and woody when overly mature. We also use varieties of summer and winter squash that have some resistance to powdery mildew.

We had great success with melons last year because we chose varieties that were well adapted to our growing conditions. The 'Orange Silverwave' honeydew was outstanding, as was the 'Blacktail Mountain' watermelon.

Both are 75-day varieties. We also grew a French Charentais variety of melon called 'Alvaro.' The 'Alvaro' variety was productive but quickly went from ripe to overripe so it required more careful management. If you want to brighten someone's day, give them a fresh picked melon that tastes like summer!

Green beans are nutritious, easy to grow and very productive. Carrots also store well, can have a long harvest window, and everyone knows what to do with them. Garlic is planted in the fall, is highly nutritious and expensive. You can choose a soft neck variety for storage and share your bounty all year. You only need to purchase starter bulbs once, just save a few bulbs each year to plant again in following years.

Cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli are great for sharing as they store well and are suitable for two plantings per year (early spring and late summer). Many varieties of broccoli continue to produce florets after the primary crown is harvested. We prefer heat tolerant varieties for spring planting. 'Katrina' cabbage and 'Candid Charm' cauliflower have done very well for us.

Peppers and tomatoes are of course popular. A good short season (65 day) tomato to consider is 'Stupice' and a favorite snacking tomato is the 'Sungold.' This last variety, a cherry tomato, does not work well for our high production-focused donation program because they are labor intensive to harvest and split

easily but are wonderful for a garden snack for those working in the garden.

We always rescue several trays of vegetable starts (mostly tomato, squash, eggplant and pepper) from local retailers at the end of the seedling sale season. Some of these get planted in the community garden and the rest are fostered out to local gardeners to grow for the food pantry. Consider asking your local retailers for a similar courtesy.

Don't forget the flowers! A homegrown bouquet can bring great joy to people and is a luxury many cannot afford.

Please consider growing a little extra this year to share with your community. It is truly a gift!

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