



In this August 1942 photograph, apparently prepared to serve as the cover page to an article in a publication of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Williams proudly show off their Victory Garden. During World War II federal government agencies promoted home vegetable gardens to increase wartime food production. *Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection, 00047190.*

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# THE HISTORIAN'S EYE

**A**n August 14, 1942, article in the *Los Angeles Evening Herald Examiner* promoted a local couple's Victory Garden as an exemplary role model:

Twenty-six varieties of vegetables were raised by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Williams, 1403 Dalton Avenue, with no trouble at all, they say. For the small sum of \$8.60 they grew enough fresh greens to keep their own household and half of their neighbors supplied. They're sold on victory gardens.

During World War I, the National War Garden Commission distributed posters with pictures of Miss Liberty holding up fresh produce and slogans such as "The seeds of victory insure the fruits of peace" that linked home vegetable gardens to victory and patriotism. During World War II, the Farm Security Agency and Office of War Information utilized a softer sell in magazine and newspaper articles depicting ordinary folks like this elderly couple, housewives, and Girl Scouts at work in their gardens in a way that readers could identify with, persuading them that they, too, could cheaply and easily supply bountiful crops. Coming just after the Depression, this bounty and ease were reassuring and encouraging.

In the 1970s a city program of community gardens on empty lots encouraged Angelenos to engage in growing whatever they wished in plots for which they registered. The experiment was no longer a war measure but enabled city dwellers to engage in healthy and sociable activities as well as to supplement their tables.

Almost fifty years later, another generation of educators in both K-12 and university settings have helped facilitate and mobilize recent urban farming movements that have started to redefine Southern California. These efforts—including the work of scholars at Whittier College's Sustainable Urban Farm Lab ([www.sustainability.whittier.edu/domains/programs/food-systems/surf/](http://www.sustainability.whittier.edu/domains/programs/food-systems/surf/))—have harnessed the narrative power of historical ecology. The "Open Garden" project ([www.opengaarden.com](http://www.opengaarden.com)), for example, georeferences earlier agricultural landscapes (like the victory gardens) to inspire students and communities to reimagine the current and future landscapes of Los Angeles, and the Garden School Foundation, an environmental nonprofit based in Los Angeles, focuses on ecological literacy at the K-12 level ([www.gardenschoolfoundation.org](http://www.gardenschoolfoundation.org)). We're sold on these ideas!

—Natale Zappia and Merry Ovnick