

Get growing: Food security blossoms across the state

After a colder and wetter spring than normal, backyard gardeners across Colorado are planting, tending, and preparing to harvest for the second season of Grow & Give, a program whose volunteers raise and donate fresh fruits and vegetables for statewide distribution to people in need.

Grow & Give is a project of the Colorado Master Gardener Program, a well-known part of CSU Extension. Volunteer participation is open to any Colorado gardener.

The project sprouted in Spring 2020 in response to skyrocketing food needs among people coping with unemployment and other hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is modeled on backyard victory gardens that boosted food supplies and morale during the bleak years of World War I and World War II.

It was so successful in its first season that Grow & Give is back, with a broader goal of boosting food security in Colorado communities over the long term, said Katie Dunker, statewide coordinator for the Colorado Master Gardener Program, who helps lead Grow & Give.

“This is where CSU Extension can make such a big difference connecting people to solve real needs in their communities,” Dunker said. “It took a pandemic for us to see all this capacity, but we’re going to continue this work. It hits all the marks for a land-grant university.”

Last year, nearly 600 volunteer gardeners signed up. They grew and donated more than 47,000 pounds of produce in 25 Colorado counties.

The fresh fruits and vegetables went to food banks, pantries, homeless shelters, and other nonprofits for distribution to individuals and families facing hunger and food shortages.

Organizers expect the number of participants and food donations to expand in the second year of Grow & Give.

To support backyard gardeners, the Colorado Master Gardener Program has a few new offerings, including:

- A free, 85-page Colorado Vegetable Guide available for download in English and Spanish. The guide offers crop-by-crop guidance for gardeners; learn to grow everything from asparagus to zucchini.
- A new mobile app that connects gardeners to hunger-relief organizations. It’s offered in partnership with the Colorado nonprofit Fresh Food Connect and demonstrates how Grow & Give is using technology to expand its reach.
- A free online vegetable course is scheduled June 1-14. Offered through CSU Professional Education, the asynchronous course is designed for novice and experienced gardeners alike.

For more information, gardening resources, and to volunteer with Grow & Give, visit growandgivecolorado.org.

About CSU Extension:

CSU Extension empowers Coloradans to address important and emerging community needs using dynamic, science-based educational resources. For over 100 years, CSU Extension has helped people in Colorado find the answers they need for a healthy home life, successful business and thriving community. We bring the University’s research-based resources to local communities across the state.

About the Colorado Master Gardener Program:

Colorado Master Gardeners enhance Colorado communities through outreach, education, and environmental stewardship. Powered by CSU Extension, the [Master Gardener Program](#) enhances Coloradans' quality of life by extending science-based education to local communities, helping individuals make informed decisions about plants, and fostering successful gardeners while protecting neighborhood environments.

About CSU Professional Education:

CSU Professional Education builds personal and professional development programs with the intention of delivering a lifelong, positive impact. Our mission is to serve people from all walks of life, so everyone benefits and has the opportunity to take that next step in their career or personal growth. CSU Professional Education is committed to providing a variety of high-quality courses in online and in-person formats. We partner with industry experts and CSU faculty to build our programs, ensuring our students receive research-based, relevant instruction. Explore [additional programs here](#).

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