



This is a grassroots movement.  
Move grass. Grow food.

## 2020 Garden Mentor Program New Gardener Manual

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

### **New Gardener Contact Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Victory Garden Initiative**  
249 E. Concordia Ave.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53212  
414-431-0888  
VictoryGardenInitiative.org

**Dear Garden Mentor,**

Thank you for volunteering to help show others the joys of gardening! Your time and advice will change the food system for a person, a family, and a community. The Garden Mentor Program has two goals. First, to help new gardeners experience success in their first season. We believe that early success makes new gardeners more likely to continue growing food in years to come. Second, we want Garden Mentors to build community around growing food. By getting to know our neighbors, we build a resilient network of homesteaders and gardeners who can help each other and encourage others to grow their own food.

Relationship building is at the core of this program. It is important to learn about your gardener and their goals first. The advice you provide should be based on the individual needs of the gardener(s) you are paired with. Some gardeners may be interested in topics not covered here. Therefore, this packet should be used as a guide rather than a road map. In the past our program had required you to meet with your gardener five times over the course of the growing season, but we understand that people are busy and cannot necessarily commit to this requirement and most people do not seek this much assistance. That is why we have changed the structure of the program to be more relaxed to accommodate each new gardener at their (and your) own convenience. We do ask that you make yourself available for one session **before** the BLITZ in May to help gardeners choose their garden location if needed as this is one of our biggest requests of garden mentors from garden recipients.

Each "session" mentioned in this manual are suggested topics of planning and conversation that relate to the garden's progress and/or potential issues that have arisen for the gardener. While we have provided topics and resources to help you along, each gardener is different and we encourage you to assess their needs *first* before referring back to the schedule in your packet. Feel free to provide your gardener with these or other resources you have gathered over your time as a gardener.

**Organic Policy:** We ask that you do not suggest any non-organic herbicides, fungicides, or pesticides for our new gardeners. VGI promotes organic, chemical-free growing because we believe this is the safest option for our bodies and environment.

We do not expect everyone to be total garden experts to participate as a mentor! Throughout the growing season, feel free to check in with VGI if you have questions about anything. You can reach Montana at [montana@victorygardeninitiative.org](mailto:montana@victorygardeninitiative.org) or 414-431-0888 x402 with any related questions you may have throughout the duration of this program.

Again, thank you for your commitment in helping Milwaukee develop its culture around growing and eating local food.

Sincerely,  
The Victory Garden Initiative Team

**Victory Garden Initiative**  
414-431-0888  
VictoryGardenInitiative.org

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# Important Dates

**Note:** All dates and sessions are **suggestions** on when to meet and gardening topics that should be covered based on the time of season.

**\*\*Session 1: Before the BLITZ (Prior to May 9th)** - Contact your Garden Mentee before the BLITZ to introduce yourself and get an idea of the level of assistance they will be hoping for throughout the season. Many people like help deciding where their garden should go during this time. If you find out during this time your mentee wants more assistance than you can provide, please let them and Montana know ASAP so we can assign someone else.

**Session 2: June** - Meet with or contact your new gardener to check-in on their progress, address any potential concerns, and discussed suggested session topics if desired.

**BLITZ Gardener Party: June-July-** Please attend our mid-season party with BLITZ gardeners, volunteers and mentors!

**Session 3: July** - Meet with or contact your new gardener to check-in on their progress, address any potential concerns, and discussed suggested session topics if desired.

**Session 4: August or September** - Meet with or contact your new gardener to check-in on their progress, address any potential concerns, and discussed suggested session topics if desired.

**Session 5: September or October** - Meet with or contact your new gardener to check-in on their progress, address any potential concerns, and discussed suggested session topics if desired.

# Session 1: Before the BLITZ

## (Prior to May 9th)

### Introductions

Break the ice! Ask your mentee questions about themselves and tell them a story about how you first learned to garden. Feel free to fill in the blanks below.

Why are you starting a garden?

What are your goals with the garden?

What kind of food would you like to grow?

What do you already know about gardening?

What do you think you'll need help with?

### Location of the Garden

Preferably the location will have southerly exposure and will receive at least 6-8 hours of sun during the course of the day.

- Determine which direction is South
- Identify major shadow-casting objects (houses, trees, etc.) that will block sunlight
- Find a spot in the yard that will likely have the greatest amount of sunlight
- Help the gardener mark the 4 corners of the new garden (4'x8') with stakes/sticks
- Make sure the garden location is flat (or that they understand they need to level the area themselves before May 9th)
- How far is the water source? How will you get water to your garden?
- Avoid placing the garden too close to toxic plants like black walnut or butternut trees

## Selecting Crops

Helping your gardener select their first crops! Remember to explain that seeds can be sown densely at first and thinned out later. You can show them how to use this crop planning chart to get organized. This would also be a good time to introduce them to intercropping & companion planting.

If your Mentee can afford to buy seedlings, this can be a good recommendation for new growers, especially with certain crops that take a longer time to grow from seed than we typically have in the outdoor growing season in Wisconsin like:

- Tomatoes, Peppers, brussel sprouts, melons, eggplant

**Intercropping:** a multiple cropping practice involving growing two or more crops in proximity. The most common goal of **intercropping** is to produce a greater yield on a given piece of land by making use of resources or ecological processes that **would** otherwise not be utilized by a single crop.

**Companion Planting:** The close planting of different plants that enhance each other's growth or protect each other from pests

Intercropping Checklist:

- Crop groupings should have similar sun, water, soil preferences
- Combine different root growth patterns (carrots alongside tomatoes, for example)
- Try to space out plants in the same family for disease prevention

Vegetable	Planting Date	Seed Depth	Spacing Needs	Water Needs	Mature Plant Height

## Garden Map

Use this map to decide where plants will go. The gardener doesn't need to decide everything right now, but help them get started. Remember to label North, South, West, and East; each box is a square foot.

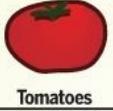

### Example Garden:

Lettuce		Eggplant	Tomatoes	Pole Beans
Greens		Carrots		

Check out Handout “Companion Planting: Basic Concepts & Resources” for more information.

Here are some graphic resources that can help determine which crops to plant throughout the season in the Greater Milwaukee Area. (from Journal Sentinel and Urban Farm)

**Planting calendar** Use this guide to map out what and when to plant outside in your garden.

Late April (When ground temperature is reliably 50 degrees)		Early May		Late May - Early June		
Seed	Transplant*	Seed	Transplant	Seed	Transplant	
 Beets	 Radishes	 Leeks	 Beans	 Broccoli	 Basil	 Basil
 Carrots	 Spinach		 Early corn	 Early cabbage	 Brussels sprouts	 Brussels sprouts
 Chard	 Onions (sets)**		 Pumpkin	 Cauliflower	 Late cabbage	 Eggplant
 Lettuce				 Parsley	 Late corn	 Peppers
 Peas					 Cucumbers	 Pumpkin
 Seed potatoes					 Dill & Cilantro	 Summer squash
					 Melons	 Tomatoes
					 Winter squash	 Tomatillos

\* A transplant is a seedling with roots and leaves that was grown in a small pot from seed.  
 \*\* An onion set is a small immature onion bulb, which you plant into the ground.

Journal Sentinel graphic: ZEINA MAKKY / zmakky@journalsentinel.com

Sources: Anna Thomas Bates, Megan Cain at [www.creativevegetablegardener.com](http://www.creativevegetablegardener.com),  
 UW Extension: Vegetable Cultivars and Planting Guide for Wisconsin Growers; Burpee



# Session 2: June

## Check-In

How did planting go?

What are you enjoying most so far?

What issues have arisen?

## Thinning & Weeding

Thinning provides space for healthy plants to mature.

- Look for weeds growing and pull them at the roots carefully.
- Examine the plants. Look for second leaves as an indicator the plant is healthy.
- Check plant spacing requirements.
- Pull fledgling root crops up gently when thinning, so as not to disturb the remaining plants' roots.
- For cultivars like lettuce, trim or pinch where the plant meets the soil.
- Continually thin until the plants are ready for harvest. Remember, young plants are edible too!

## Watering

Discuss watering with your gardener.

Which plants need the most water?

How much natural rainfall has there been?

A general rule of thumb is 1 in. of water per week for a vegetable garden. For one raised bed, that's about 25 gallons a week.

## Compost

What does your gardener know about composting?

Do they have any materials readily available to start a pile? (Newspaper, paper bags, wood chips for a brown source; pallets or old bins for structure)

See the handout **“Home Composting: The Complete Composter”** for more information.

## Trellising and Pruning

Talk to your gardener about trellising and pruning plants like tomatoes, cucumbers, and pole beans. What materials do the gardeners have readily available for trellising? (Sticks, string, etc.)

Please see the appendix handouts on tomatoes and **“Trellising, Staking, and Caging.”**

## Mulching

Discuss the use of mulch to conserve water, reduce weed pressure, and slowly add organic matter to the soil. See the handout and **“Mulches for home gardens and plantings”** for additional information.

What materials are readily available for this gardener to use as mulch? Shredded cardboard or newspaper, straw, and fallen leaves all make great mulch.

# Session 3: July

## Check-In

Have you harvested anything yet?

Do you have any questions about garden maintenance?

What is the most difficult part of gardening so far?

## Succession Planting

Make sure gardeners are aware that they can continue planting in their garden throughout the season. As they harvest, they can replace old plants (i.e. bolted lettuce) with new seeds or transplants. You can't eat empty soil!

Please see the **“Refresh Your Vegetable Garden for a Fall Crop”** and **“Extending the Gardening Season”** handouts for more information.

# Late Season Crops

Use this page to help the gardener plan the later phase of the garden. Keep in mind the August 1<sup>st</sup> deadline for planting many of these crops! (See planting guide in appendix).

Vegetable	Planting Date	Seed Depth	Spacing Needs	Water Needs	Mature Plant Height

## Garden Map

Fill in existing plants, then use this map to sketch where fall crops can soon be planted. Remember to label North, South, West, and East; each box is a square foot.


# Session 4: August/September

## Check-In

How is everything progressing?

How has mulching been going?

What have you harvested so far?

What questions do you need answered?

## Compost Maintenance

Take a look at the compost pile/bin together.

Is the compost pile generating heat? (It should be!)

Is there a correct mix of carbon and nitrogen? Has the pile been turned?

Is the compost being kept moist?

## **Disease Prevention**

Keep in mind that healthy soil and healthy plants are the best safeguard against disease. In addition, planting a diverse garden will prevent pests or diseases from gaining a foothold in the garden.

Mulch around tomatoes, potatoes, and cucurbits (cucumbers, melons, squash) to prevent soil from splashing during watering. This can help prevent blight and other soil-borne diseases.

See the link <https://vegento.russell.wisc.edu/crops/> for more information on Wisconsin insect pests specific to different crops.

# Session 5: September/October

## Check-In

What issues have arisen so far?

What are you confused about?

What are you enjoying most so far?

What questions do you need answered?

## Preparing for the End of the Season

Gardeners will need to replace the nutrients and organic matter that the soil lost over the course of the season with compost, mulch, or other amendments. Remind gardeners that all of the dead plants from the season can be composted (unless they are diseased)! Suggest creating a second compost pile for the winter so that the summer's compost can be used to prepare the bed for winter and provide nutrients for next year's growing season.

## Sheet Mulching

Suggest sheet mulching as an easy way to add nutrients and rebuild the soil after a season of cultivation. Explain that nutrients need to be replaced in order to ensure healthy soil and healthy plants next year. Compost started early in the season should be ready to use for this purpose! Feel free to reference the mulching resource again.

## **Debriefing**

Take a few minutes to debrief the season with your gardener. You can use the following questions to help you:

How have your thinking, opinions, and beliefs about gardening changed through this program?

What has been the biggest challenge to your learning over the course of the program?

Which aspects of the Garden Mentor program have been the most useful? Which have been the least useful?

Has your garden been a success according to your expectations?

Do you feel comfortable gardening successfully on your own next season?

## **Evaluation**

Look for a program evaluation survey in your email in late fall. We want to make this program better each year! Feel free to share with us throughout the growing season as well.