

Grow a bountiful garden and share with the hungry

By Melinda Myers

Do you always squeeze in an extra tomato plant, another row of beans or hill of zucchini? It seems like a good idea at the time, until they all start to produce all at once. Your family, friends and co-workers start to hide as you try to pawn off yet another bag of zucchini or tomatoes. Here is a solution that satisfies your gardening obsession and feeds the hungry in your community. Designate some growing space to a giving garden and donate the harvest to your local food pantry.

Feeding America reports that 41 million Americans struggle with hunger. And many are children and seniors. Gardener's Supply Company is inviting gardeners to lend a hand and take the **"Garden to Give" pledge** to grow food to give to those in need.

They surveyed food pantries to find out what types of fruits and veggies people most enjoy eating, and those that store well. Best of all these late maturing vegetables will be ready for harvest all at about the same time, so you can make your donation in just one trip.

Don't let a lack of space stop you from participating. Plant a row or container of one or more of these vegetables to share; join forces with a neighbor who may have the space, but only limited time to garden; or gather a few friends and rent a community garden plot. Together you can grow fresh produce and memories to share.

Get the children in your life involved in growing and giving. Gardening increases focus, decreases stress and elevates children's moods. Giving helps children grow into caring well-

rounded adults. Plus, if they grow the vegetables, they are more likely to eat them.

Be sure to capture a few photographs of your donation to inspire others to follow your lead. Starting in August, you can enter Gardener's Supply's online "Show What You Share," photo contest for a chance to win a prize for you and your local food pantry.

With the "Garden to Give," program, everyone who participates is a winner. The real prize is making a difference while doing something you love. Once you've experienced the benefits of sharing fresh produce with the hungry in your community, you are likely to find yourself making regular donations of garden fresh fruits and veggies to those in need... and feeling great about it, too.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening." She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything: Food Gardening For Everyone" DVD set and the nationally syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" TV and radio segments.