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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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Subject: "TO GROW OR NOT TO GROW." Information from gardening specialists of U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Last summer, by the time many homemakers got around to thinking about a victory garden, it was too late to begin one. Then they spent the summer envying those foresighted neighbors who did "grow their own." If this happened to you, your mind's probably made up that you'll have a garden of your own this summer, so you can enjoy fresh, healthful vegetables, and have enough to can for ration-free meals next winter.

If that's what you've decided--fine! What this country needs is more victory gardens--in fact, we're hoping for 22 millions of them this year. Every bit of food civilians can raise helps relieve the heavy wartime burden on commercial food supplies. But--before you begin a garden, make sure your plans are based on more than a passing enthusiasm. Make sure that if you begin, you'll follow through. In wartime, the energy, time, and materials that go into a garden are all too valuable an investment to be squandered.

First of all, ask yourself, "Have I time for a garden?" Most homemakers have extra work now--perhaps you're even working outside your home part- or full-time. And you know vegetable seeds--unlike Topsy--don't "just grow." So unless you are prepared to give a garden the attention it needs--about an hour a day for a small-family-size plot--you won't do justice to your investment in materials that go into your garden.

Another factor is the location of your garden plot. Farm families usually have the pick of several pieces of land, but the town or city gardener rarely has much choice. Usually he or she must take what is in the back yard, or in a nearby

community garden or vacant lot. If this is true with you, study your lot carefully to see that it will give worthwhile returns for what you put into it.

The things that make a good garden plot are sunlight...reasonably good soil... a fairly level location...and good drainage.

Most vegetables need at least six hours of sun a day. If your lot's in between buildings, or if it's wooded, so the sun shines on it six hours or less, don't expect much success with such crops as tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, and lima beans. The leafy crops--lettuce, spinach, and the like--will tolerate a little shade better than the fruit-and seed-bearing crops.

Thin stony soil, or heavy, clay-ey soil, is typical of many town and city lots. Such soil may be hard to work, but you can use it. However, if your lot's been filled up with excavation dirt, or trash, it's not likely to produce much, and you'll do well to try to find another location for your garden. One way to judge a vacant lot is by the wild growth on it: if weeds or grass grow rank and thick, the soil will probably make a good garden.

While it's best to have a level garden, it's not essential. However, sloping ground will take more work and care on your part, to keep the soil and crops from washing.

Drainage is important in the success of a garden, so avoid a plot that's inclined to be very wet, or one where water stands on the ground or washes down from above.

Still another point to consider in selecting a garden plot is its nearness to your home--the closer, the better, because you'll want to work in the garden every day, and if it's too far from home, you'll be tempted to neglect it.

Of course, all this talk about what to look for in a garden plot isn't intended to discourage you from having a garden. On the contrary, it will help you judge the good and bad features of the available land, and so help you select the best possible plot...and it will keep you from making the mistake of beginning a garden if the only land you can get actually is undesirable.

This year gardening involves more than just your own time and labor. Those are important, of course--to you, and to the whole nation, because we don't want to squander energy we might put to good use. If you start a garden that turns out a failure you will not only have wasted your own time and labor but valuable materials: seed, fertilizer, and tools, as well.

So take all these points into account when you consider the problem "to grow or not to grow." We need all the food we can grow in victory gardens this year--not only to release commercially grown foods for war, but because we need more of the kind of food that comes out of victory gardens--foods rich in minerals and vitamins.

Our national health stands to benefit greatly from our victory gardens; and to the individual family a garden is an economical source of good food. But on the other hand, the national good requires that each gardener make the most of all garden materials, to get the utmost production from them.

Consider these points when you decide whether or not you'll grow a victory garden this year.

