

OSU Extension gives away seeds for Grow This! Garden Challenge

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CORVALLIS, Ore. – Almost 38,000 free seed packets will be distributed by Oregon State University Extension Service to Oregonians who show no signs of losing the enthusiasm for gardening generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grow This! Oregon Garden Challenge kicks off March 1 when people can sign up and start preparing to collect their seed kits at the end of March. The seed kits will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis at county [Extension offices](#) throughout the state, according to Halie Cousineau, OSU Extension Food Hero state garden education coordinator.

The seed packets, donated by Bi-Mart, will be packaged into 8,000 seed kits of four different plants: one cool-weather vegetable, one warm-weather vegetable, one herb or edible flowers and flowers to encourage pollination.

When people sign up, they're asked to complete a survey about what level of experience and interest they have in gardening. The feedback will help Cousineau adjust the program to meet the needs of potential participants. The challenge is open to anyone, but only Oregonians will receive seeds. Cousineau encourages even those not in Oregon to garden along.

The gardening challenge, spearheaded by Food Hero, a statewide initiative of the Oregon Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) program and was developed by OSU Extension in English and Spanish. It expanded from last year, when Cousineau and a few colleagues, separated, counted and packaged the seed from 800 seed packets to make 14,000 individual baggies to include in 3,500 seed kits.

This year, leftover seed goes to OSU Extension Master Gardeners Champions, who are joining the challenge and will garden along with participants, give feedback and tell their stories of growing some of the seeds.

"We're thrilled that Master Gardeners are joining the 2021 Grow This! Oregon Garden Challenge," said Lauren Tobey, Food Hero coordinator. "They'll be answering participants' questions and sharing tips from around the state to support a healthy harvest."

The [Food Hero Facebook page](#) will hold weekly office hours when gardeners can ask questions, post photos and brag about their accomplishments, Cousineau said. Videos will come out bi-monthly and information on social media will be ongoing. In addition to the information printed on the seed packets, participants can click on images of seeds and read detailed planting directions. Once they harvest their produce, gardeners can find more than 300 recipes using vegetables and fruits on the [Food Hero website](#).

Children are part of the program, too. Beginning April 1, digital lessons will be released every Thursday through June 10 when school ends. The lineup includes Growing Healthy Kids with OSU Master Gardeners and a four-week lesson plan in partnership with the Oregon Bee Project. Kids will learn about how bees help make healthy food and how to identify several of Oregon's bees.

Throughout summer and into fall, participants will receive a monthly Grow This! Oregon Garden Challenge email with gardening information, harvest recipes and storage tips. Challenge information will also be available in English and Spanish on

the [Food Hero gardening page](#). For more personalized interaction, participants can email challenge leaders or email or call the [Master Gardeners in their area](#).

Cousineau said instructions and tips will include information on all types of gardening situations like planting in containers or even indoors.

“We’re trying to make the program accessible to anyone, children, elders, people with special needs and the diversity of cultural populations in Oregon,” she said. “We’re encouraging people anywhere to join. We really want to make sure the information we provide will make people successful. We want to make a community.”

About the OSU Extension Service: The Oregon State University Extension Service shares research-based knowledge with people and communities in Oregon’s 36 counties. OSU Extension addresses issues that matter to urban and rural Oregonians. OSU Extension’s partnerships and programs contribute to a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future for Oregon.

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