

# SOWING SEEDS... HARVESTING HOPE

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## ***A GUIDE TO STARTING A SEED & SEEDLING DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM***

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### **HUNGER ACTION NETWORK OF NEW YORK STATE**

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FUNDED IN PART BY A GRANT FROM THE NEW YORK STATE COMMUNITY ACTION ASSOC.  
& THE US DEPT. OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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## **SOWING SEEDS...HARVESTING HOPE**

This guide is dedicated to the many individuals across the state who work to end hunger in your community. Without your hard work and dedication, the pain of hunger in New York State would be far greater.

Sowing Seeds...Harvesting Hope is designed to help people and organizations start a seed and seedling distribution program. We know that it is not often easy to add another task to an already overburdened schedule. But as the number of families seeking food assistance continues to grow, we must begin to use new methods in the struggle to end hunger.

This program offers a less traditional approach to the problem of food insecurity. We wish you success in starting a program and happy growing!



Hunger Action Network of New York State is a statewide membership organization of direct food providers, low-income individuals, communities of faith, grassroots advocates and other individuals whose goal is to increase the amount of food provided to hungry New Yorkers, while building unified statewide advocacy for long-term solutions to hunger, and its root causes, including poverty.

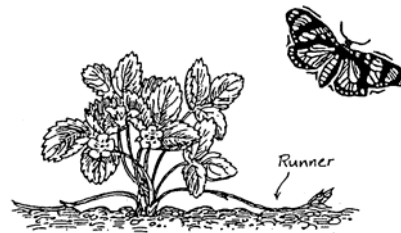
Guide Updated by (May 2002):  
Sheila McCarthy  
Susannah Pasquantonio  
*CFNP Statewide Coordinators*



## WHAT IS A SEED & SEEDLING DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM?

Every year truckloads of vegetable seedlings go to waste because commercial greenhouses, as well as home gardeners, start more plants than they can use. If approached, most nurseries and greenhouses are happy to donate their extra seedlings rather than see them go to waste. Any interested organization or group may choose to collect these extra seedlings and distribute them to low-income individuals along with basic planting and care instructions.

A seed and seedling distribution program is a simple, effective way to enable low-income people to grow fresh, wholesome food for themselves and their families.



Included in this guide is information about what resources and materials you will need to start a seedling distribution program, instructions about how to organize your program, and tips for taking care of vegetable plants. Also included are materials describing how to run a "Gardening in a Bucket" program, which involves providing food service buckets along with vegetable seedlings, potting soil and "how to garden in a container" information. Last, but not least, are a number of sample letters, flyers and other outreach materials to help you get started. Please feel free to contact the Hunger Action Network for any assistance. Good luck!



## **WHY OFFER A SEED & SEEDLING DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM?**



Seedling programs have many benefits. Perhaps the most important is the increased level of food security experienced by families who have the opportunity to grow their own vegetables. Families also experience the added benefit of increasing their horticultural skills and developing an increased connection with, and respect for, the environment.

Growing food is also an important part of our cultural heritage, a heritage that many of us have lost touch with. Reclaiming seedlings that would otherwise be disposed of also helps limit our solid waste. The rewards are numerous.

## **WHO CAN OFFER A SEED & SEEDLING DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM?**

Any individual or group connected with low-income people can potentially set up a seed and seedling distribution program. Emergency Food Programs (EFPs) are particularly well-suited, as their guests clearly have food shortage problems. However, any civic organization or community based program that provides services to low-income people can start a distribution program. Some of the basic resources needed to start a program are listed on page 3.

## WHAT RESOURCES & MATERIALS ARE NEEDED?

**Coordinator.** This can be a shared responsibility. Your level of time commitment can vary. You can run a small program by setting aside one hour a week to pick up and deliver vegetable seeds or plants. You can also chose to distribute a large amount of seedlings and spend an hour or two each day for several weeks to coordinate activities.

**Listing of greenhouses, nurseries, and farms.** Look in your local yellow pages or contact the NYS Dept. of Agriculture & Markets, 1 Winners Circle, Albany, NY 12235 (518) 457-2087 to locate the greenhouses and nurseries near you. Your County Cooperative Extension office may have a listing of outlets in your area. See pages 9 - 10 for a listing of County Cooperative Extension Offices in New York State. Hunger Action also has a list of nurseries and greenhouses.

**Vehicle.** You may need a vehicle if you are planning to pick up seedlings from a greenhouse near you. A truck or van is preferable, but a car will do. If you are distributing seeds and not seedlings, you do not need a vehicle.

**Storage space.** If you are planning on storing seedlings for several days, make sure your vegetable plants are not kept in full sun light and water them daily. It is ideal to deliver vegetable seedlings directly unless you want to get into the nursery business!

**Distribution Site.** This is a place where your seeds or seedlings will be distributed to low-income persons.

**Information about how to grow and care for vegetable seeds & seedlings.** Hunger Action Network has a flyer on basic plant care instructions that we can provide to you. Community garden programs or your local Cooperative Extension office should have these materials if you need them (see list of Cornell Cooperative Extension Offices on pages 9 - 10).

**Outreach plan.** Inform people about your program. A flyer may help people know about planned distributions or some other system for "getting the word out". A sample outreach flyer can be found on pg. 13.



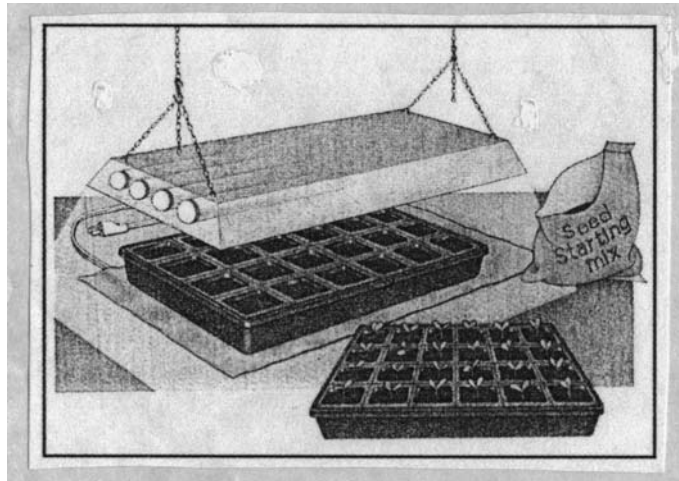
## HOW DOES IT WORK?



- 1. Contact nurseries, greenhouses and farms.** In late April or early May, send a mailing to greenhouses, nurseries and farms in your vicinity requesting donations of seeds and seedlings (see "What Resources and Materials are Needed" section on page 3 for donation sources). Explain what your intentions are; that the plants and seeds will be distributed to low-income people in an effort to improve their access to nutritious, affordable food (See page 11 for a sample letter of request). Keep a master list of the businesses you solicit. This will come in handy for making follow up phone calls, sending thank you notes and for soliciting again next season.
- 2. Contact other local community groups.** Another possible source for seedlings is to appeal to volunteer groups, local schools, and children's groups and ask them to grow seedlings for you as a project. Centers for the developmentally disabled often have therapeutic horticulture programs and may be willing to have their clients grow vegetable seedlings for your program. If groups need help setting up a seedling project they can contact their local Cooperative Extension agent.
- 3. If necessary, make arrangements to store seedlings.** Make sure you have a good space available to store the seedlings if the donated plants need to be kept for several days before distribution (see page 6 for "Quick, Easy Tips for Taking Care of Seedlings"). Make sure donated seedlings are in good condition before they are distributed. The plants may need water (seedlings' roots dry out fairly quickly, especially in warm weather and need constant attention). Also look for visible signs of pests, particularly white flies, by checking the leaves. Seedlings that aren't healthy are not likely to do well, especially for inexperienced gardeners. It is good to have hearty, pest and disease free plants to distribute.

**4. COORDINATE PICK UP AND DELIVERY OF SEEDLINGS.**

Make follow up phone calls in late May or early June (Memorial Day weekend is peak planting time for home gardeners, and nurseries are anxious to clear out any remaining inventory). Many outlets will have leftover plants they will be glad to donate. Remember to ask each business if they would like to make another donation later in the season when you pick up the donations. Make arrangements for picking up the donations and coordinate with distribution sites. Good places to distribute vegetable seedlings include: food pantries, soup kitchens, urban community gardens, subsidized or supported housing complexes, food pantry gardens, veteran's homes, street fairs in low-income neighborhoods, and senior housing.



**5. REMEMBER TO PROVIDE "HOW TO CARE FOR VEGETABLE SEEDLINGS" INFORMATION WITH THE SEEDLINGS.**

Make gardening instructions available for low-income persons who may be growing vegetables for the first time. One or two pages of easy-to-follow instructions can make your program a success. Contact Hunger Action for information.

6. **SEND LETTERS THANKING CONTRIBUTORS.** Thank you letters to seed/seedling donors and to programs that grow seedlings for you are always appreciated. Ask them to keep your program in mind for the future. A sample letter thanking contributors can be found on page 12).

## QUICK, EASY TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF VEGETABLE SEEDLINGS!

Here are a few tips for taking care of donated seedlings, especially if the donated plants need to be stored for several days before distribution.

**Do not take infested seedlings into your storage location** or distribute them to low-income persons until they are free of pests. Infestation can spread to healthy plants!



**Use ORGANIC methods to treat vegetable seedlings infested with pests.** We strongly urge you to use organic methods for controlling pests. Start with the least drastic approach. Many bugs can be taken off seedlings by hand. If hand picking does not work, try a safer soap solution spray. Remember, these plants will be **FOOD** for human consumption. Chemical free alternatives are the healthiest and safest approach to gardening. There are a number of organic treatments on the market that are both effective and inexpensive. Feel free to contact us for organic ways to control pests.

**Do not store seedlings in direct sunlight for too long.** Seedlings prefer a shady or inside location so that their roots won't dry out quickly.

**Remember to water your seedlings often!** Seedlings' roots dry out quickly. Check a least once a day to see if your plants need watering, and always give them water before dropping them off to a distribution site. Water your seeds/seedlings at least three times a week if it does not rain, and more times if they feel dry. They may need water every day, but be careful not to over water them. Newly planted seeds can drown easily!

**Try not to store seedlings for a long period of time.** The sooner the seedlings are planted in the ground, the more productive they will be.

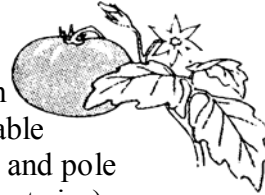


*Now that you've learned the basics for starting a Seed & Seedling Distribution Program, consider going a step further...*

## **GARDENING IN A BUCKET**

Many people may want to grow vegetables but don't have a yard to work in. You might want to expand your seed & seedling distribution program by providing participants with containers and potting soil along with the vegetable plants. If you cannot provide buckets and soil, consider providing Hunger Action's flyer on Gardening in a Bucket. Those lacking yard space can grow vegetables in a container almost anywhere as long as the seedlings get plenty of sunlight, water, and adequate drainage.

Windowsills, rooftops, decks, porches, and outdoor staircases are great places to garden in containers. In a five gallon bucket, it is possible to plant one vegetable plant or a combination of tomatoes, peppers, squash, and pole beans (each type of vegetable plant grows to a different size).



### **WHAT RESOURCES & MATERIALS ARE NEEDED?**

**Containers:** Schools, fast food restaurants, and other food service institutions often have empty five-gallon plastic buckets they will allow you to have. Call a food service manager at a local school or stop by a local fast food restaurant and explain your project to a manager. You may want to check out other community sites that may be willing to donate buckets, such as greenhouses or other businesses.

**Important!** Stick with containers that have been used for food only. Do not use buckets that have been filled with paint or construction materials. These buckets may have remaining toxins even after a thorough washing. They should not be considered safe for growing vegetables!





**Potting Soil:** If possible try to provide potting soil, along with buckets and vegetable plants. Though it is possible to grow vegetables using soil out of the average backyard, this soil is often lacking organic material and may contain either too much clay or too much sand. Any of these conditions will make a bucket garden less successful. Garden centers or a contributing nursery or greenhouse are possible places to ask for donations of potting soil.

**"How to Garden in a Bucket" Information:** Always provide written materials with the containers, potting soil, and vegetable plants. Container gardening is not difficult, but there are a few steps that must be taken to ensure success. Containers used for gardening purposes must have adequate drainage (plenty of small holes and/or gravel in the bottom of the container) in case of heavy rainfall or over watering. For more information about how to garden in a bucket see the enclosed sample "Gardening in a Bucket" flyer on page 14.

**For more information about starting a successful seed & seedling distribution program, or if you would like additional copies of any materials included in this packet, call (518) 434-7371 and ask for Sheila or call (212) 741-8192 ext. 3# and ask for Susannah.**



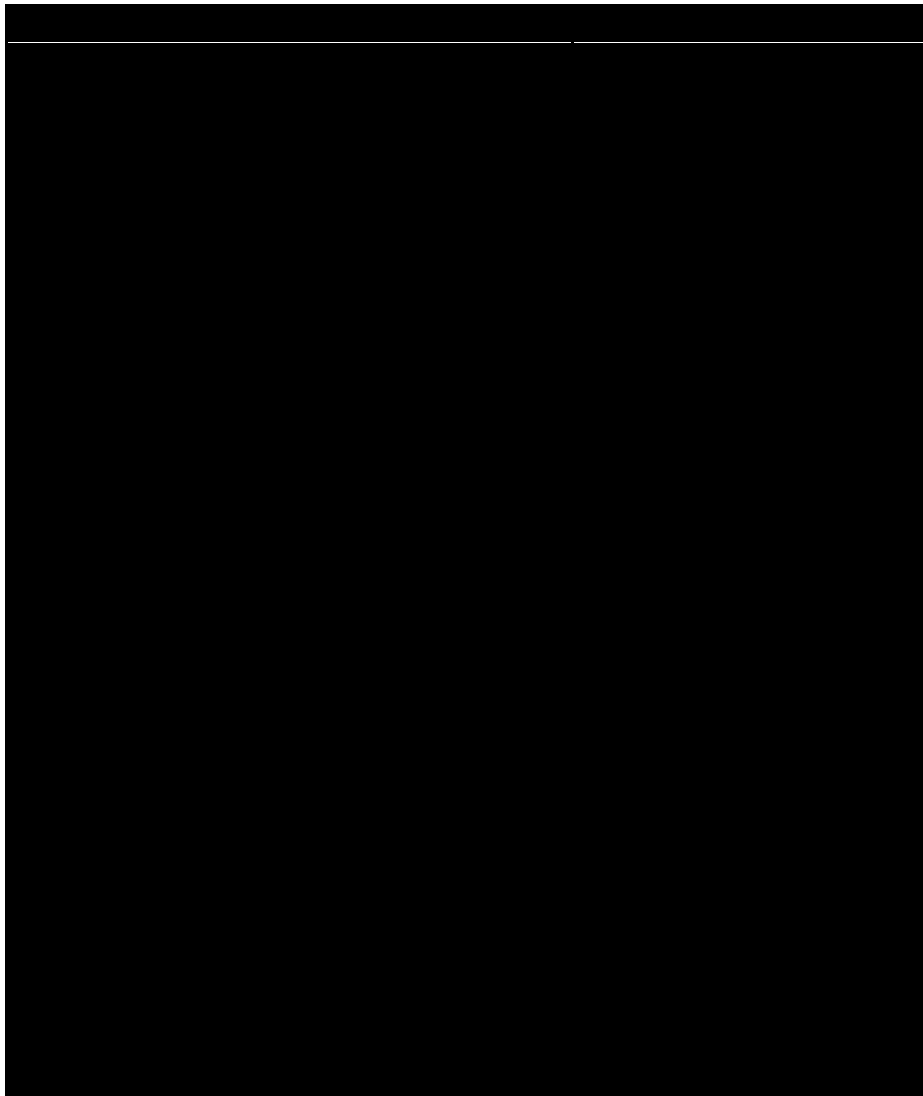
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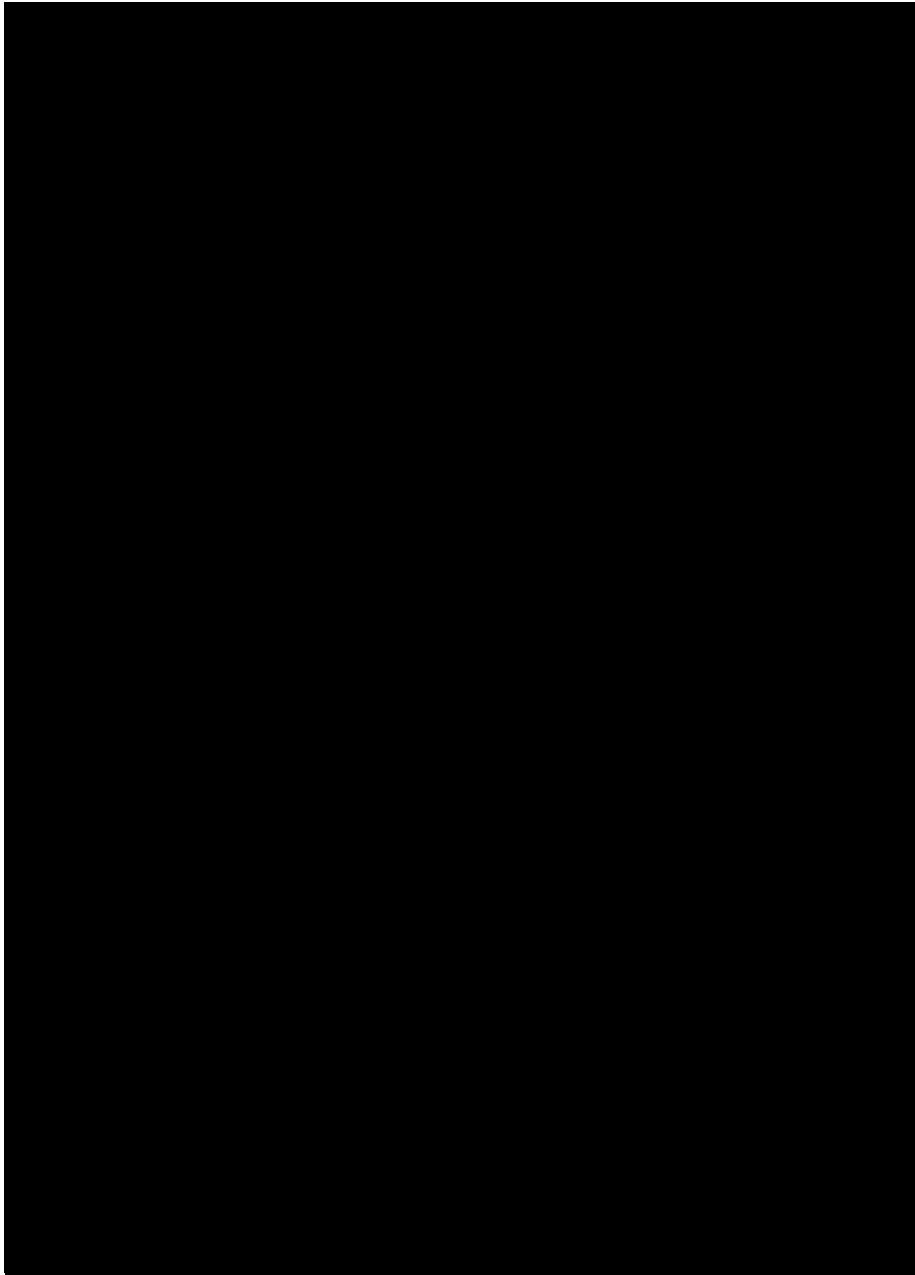
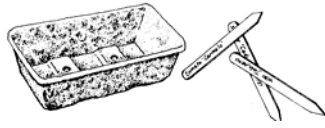
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## **CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OFFICES**

County Cooperative Extension offices are excellent sources of technical assistance for home gardeners. They have plenty of materials covering such topics as caring for seedlings, transplanting techniques, how to garden in small spaces, and coping with plant pests and diseases. Most offices can also provide technical assistance over the phone.





## Sample Letter of Request to Nurseries and Greenhouses

[DATE]

Dear Friend:

We would like to invite you to participate in our Seed & Seedling Distribution Program, which provides much needed fresh produce to low-income persons during the summer months. Please consider donating any extra vegetable seedlings or seeds that you have.

The problem of hunger continues to grow at an alarming rate. There are over 3, 000 food pantries and soup kitchens working daily to feed the hungry in New York State. These programs cannot meet this overwhelming need. Making vegetable seedlings and seeds available to guests at these programs as well as in low-income neighborhoods, senior housing complexes, and veteran's homes can help to fill the need.

It is our hope that by encouraging hungry families to begin small backyard gardens, low-income persons can have the opportunity to take part in growing their own food. They learn valuable skills about growing vegetables; skills they can use in the years to come. We are committed to providing low-cost, local solutions to the problem of hunger in [your location] by providing nutritious produce to hundreds of low-income families during the summer months.

Please contact us at [YOUR PHONE NUMBER] if you are interested in donating vegetables seedlings. Our program is dependent on donations from the community. Thank you for considering our request.

In Unity,



## **Sample Letter Thanking Nurseries and Greenhouses**

[DATE]

Dear [NAME OF PARTICIPATING BUSINESS],

Thank you for your gift of vegetable seedlings/seeds to our program. Your donation helped to support impoverished families in [YOUR LOCATION].

Overall the project was a huge success due to the generosity of businesses such as yours. Vegetable seeds & seedlings were distributed to low-income families through [DESCRIBE WHERE SEEDLINGS WERE DISTRIBUTED]. A total of [TOTAL # OF FAMILIES THAT RECEIVED SEEDLING DONATIONS] families participated in the project and are now able to enjoy fresh, wholesome vegetables this summer.

We hope that our seed & seedling distribution project will continue to be a success in the coming years. Please contact us if you have any additional seeds or seedlings you would like to donate this season. We hope you will keep us in mind for donations of seedlings next year as well.

Thank you again for your support. Together we are making a difference.

In Unity,

[If you developed an outreach flyer you might want to credit donors on the flyer and send a copy of it with your thank you letter]

## **SAMPLE OUTREACH FLYER**

### **Interested in Growing Food for Your Family This Summer?**

#### **Free Vegetable Seeds and Seedlings are available!**

We can give you lots of helpful information about how to grow vegetable plants if you are a beginner! If you don't have a yard to grow vegetables in, we have containers, soil and "How to Garden in Containers" information.

[FUN GARDENING GRAPHIC]

**We wish to thank the following contributors for  
making this program possible:**

**[LIST CONTRIBUTING NURSERIES,  
GREENHOUSES & FARMS]**

**Call [YOUR ORGANIZATION, CONTACT  
PERSON,  
& PHONE NUMBER] for more information.**



# Gardening In A Bucket



Enjoy growing your own fresh vegetables this summer without a backyard! All you need is a bucket, soil, vegetable seeds and/or plants and a sunny location indoors or out (though outside is preferred). You can grow one vegetable plant or a combination of tomato, pepper, squash and pole beans in a five gallon bucket. It may seem like this is a lot of plants for one bucket, but these different plants have different growing habits and grow to different sizes.

## Tips for Gardening in a Bucket

1. Select a bucket or other container that has not had any toxic material in it such as building/painting materials or cleaners/chemicals. Drill or nail several drainage holes into the bucket bottom.
2. Fill your bucket with soil. If you are sure of the quality of the soil in your yard you can use that, but a good blended potting soil is rich in nutrients and will work better.
3. Select the plants you want in your bucket.

## Planting Your Bucket Garden

**TOMATOES:** Cherry, patio or bush varieties work the best. Place your tomato plant in the center of the bucket and stake it. Drive a four foot pole several inches into the soil about 3" away from the stem. Tie the plant loosely to the pole with some type of cloth (cutting up an old pair of nylon stockings into strips works great!) One tomato plant per bucket!!!

**CUCUMBERS/MELONS/SQUASH:** Plant the seeds or plants in the front of your bucket and train them to grow over the side onto your porch, steps, deck or windowsill.

**PEPPERS:** Place these bush-like plants on either side of a tomato plant.

**POLE BEANS:** Plant seeds to the rear of the bucket and train the vines to grow up a string tied to the edge of the bucket.

**HAPPY GROWING!!**



## ***AMERICA the BEAUTIFUL FUND***

1730 K Street, N.W. Suite 1002 Washington, D.C. 20006 (202) 638-1649

www.freeseeds.org

### **PLANT “FREEDOM GARDENS” IN MEMORY OF THE SEPTEMBER 11TH VICTIMS**

In response to the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, America the Beautiful Fund is providing grants of 100 – 1,000 packets of seed to plant Freedom Gardens all across America. We all want to help. We all want to do something to soothe the suffering of the family and friends of victims. We all want to take part in the healing of America. Plant a Freedom Garden to preserve the memory of those lost and as a peaceful reminder of the spirit that defines us as a nation.

For 21 years we have distributed seed to grow food for the hungry, to teach environmental stewardship and to beautify America’s streets, parks, schools and places of worship. Today, we call upon Americans to plant the “seeds that grow hope” in memorium. We ask you to seek a place in your community where those who have perished will be remembered always. A place to reflect on the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, a place to celebrate our freedom and all the ways we express it. If you would like to plant a Freedom Garden, follow these steps to receive your grant of Free Seeds. You can also sponsor Freedom Gardens nation wide by making a donation below.

1. Write a letter describing your plans for your Freedom Garden
2. Fill out the application form below
3. Include a check for shipping and handling
4. Mail all of the above to:

America the Beautiful Fund, 1730 K St., Suite 1002, NW, Washington, DC 20006

<u>Contact Information</u>	<u>Shipping and Handling Fees</u>
Contact Person	First set of 100 packets = <u>\$14.95</u>
Organization Name	___ Addit’l set(s) of 100x \$5 each = ___
Name of Freedom Garden	Please specify amounts below: Vegetable ___ Flower ___ Herb ___
Shipping Address	Freedom Garden Sponsorship donation = ___
City                      State                      Zipcode	Green Earth Guide (\$10) = ___
Phone #      Fax #      E-mail address	Gardening for Optimal Nutrition: (10 @ \$10) = ___ (30 @ \$25) = ___
	TOTAL = ___

*Please note that America the Beautiful Fund is not affiliated with Hunger Action Network. Please contact them at the above address for information on their program.*





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