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Rations, Salvage, and Victory Gardens

As America became involved in the Second World War, things had to change at home. More energy and materials were funneled into the war effort, leaving fewer things for domestic or home use.

When it became clear that shortages would occur, rationing laws were passed. War industries and the military had first dibs on most products like coal, steel, wood, rubber, gasoline, sugar, and coffee. What remained was doled out to the population at home.

Ration books were issued to every person. They stipulated what items and how much of those items each person could have on a weekly basis. Gas for cars and rubber for tires was limited, so instead of driving, people walked, rode a bike, or stayed home. The slogan of the day was "use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without."

For those who didn't care to ration, there were stiff penalties. Breaking ration rules could land a person in prison for ten years with a fine of up to \$10,000. Even so, a black market soon emerged to supply hard to find items.

Earning extra money for salvaged materials became a popular activity, especially among the children. It was not unusual for children to scour forests and woods around their homes and towns. They looked for old cans and especially junked out cars or scrap metal. Farmers were encouraged to turn in their scrap metal so they could "sink a sub from their farms."

Tin cans were saved at home and recycled, as were glass bottles. Many women gave up wearing stockings so the silk and nylon could be used to make parachutes. Paper was collected and recycled. Clothes were mended and worn to avoid having to purchase new ones. Even household fats and oils from cooking were collected and reused to make explosives for the military.

Scrap drives became so effective that at one point they supplied almost half of the steel and paper that was required.

To lessen the pinch for food at home, the Victory Garden program was initiated. The Agriculture Department encouraged everyone to grow vegetables in their yards, to "Dig for victory, Plant for peace."

Even those who had never gardened before began to plant their own produce. These "Sunday Farmers" were soon making a huge difference. Not only did the gardens produce food, but they were also a way of letting your neighbors see how patriotic you were.



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The extra food was picked and canned. Fresh food was eaten at the dinner table or traded for other items. Competitions were held to find the best gardens, and recipes for using the produce were widely circulated.

The total impact of the Victory Garden was unprecedented. By 1943, it was estimated that there were over 20 million Victory Gardens in the United States. These gardens were thought to have produced more than eight million tons of food. That worked out to being almost half of the vegetables consumed in the whole country.

Most Americans were ready and willing to do almost anything necessary to support the war effort. They endured shortages, searched for salvage, and grew massive amounts of food where none had been grown before. They didn't do it for personal gain or recognition but to have a small part in the victory of freedom.

Rations, Salvage, and Victory Gardens

Questions

1. What does rationing mean?

2. List 4 things that were rationed.

3. Suppose you were not allowed to drive a car and could not ride a bike. What other ways besides walking do you think people used to get around while rationing was in effect?

_____ 4. By selling scrap metal from their farms, farmers were told they could:

- A. Sink a ship
- B. Sink a sub
- C. Fly a spitfire
- D. None of the above

_____ 5. Which of these was NOT saved in the average home for use in the war effort?

- A. Fat
- B. Rubber
- C. Paper
- D. Cans

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6. How effective were the scrap drives to the nation as a whole?

7. What reason(s) might the government have had for encouraging people to grow their own food?

8. In what ways did Americans rise to the occasion of supporting the war effort from home?

- ☐ If you were facing the rationing of many standard goods now, which ones would most likely be in short supply?
- ☐ If you were paid for each item you could recycle, how many would you find to turn in, and what would they be?
- ☐ During WWII many people planted gardens in the yards, even if they had never grown anything before. If you had lived then, what would you have grown, and why?

[illegible]