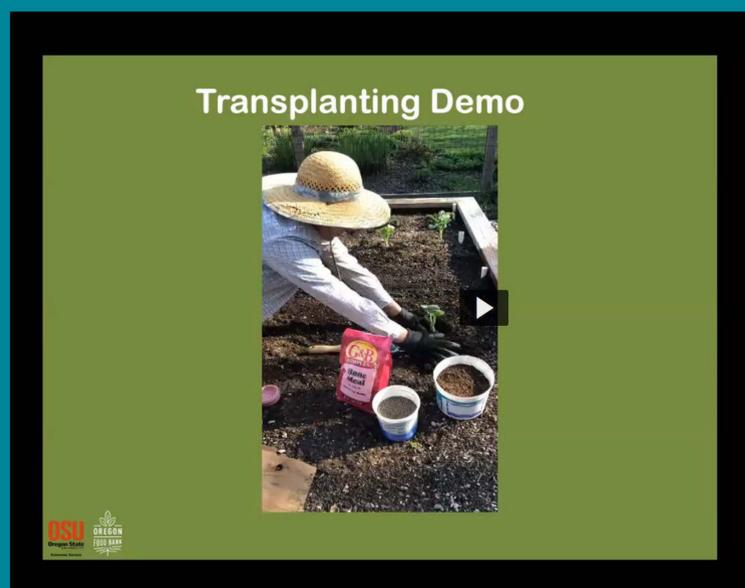


SEED TO SUPPER @HOME

INTRO GARDEN COURSE FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES GOES ONLINE

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In this screenshot from *Seed to Supper @Home*, Master Gardener volunteer Lynn Trimpe demonstrates planting starts in a video that she pre-recorded. [Click to view the movie.](#)

ISSUE

For the past six years, OSU Extension in partnership with Oregon Food Bank and the Community Garden Education Team of Benton County Master Gardener Association has taught *Seed to Supper*, an intro gardening course for low-income adults. The course is typically taught in classrooms and gardens. With COVID-19, live events were cancelled just as interest in gardening for food security surged. Volunteers who were sidelined from their typical activities proposed a creative alternative – *Seed to Supper @Home* – an online version of the course offered just in time to help new gardeners plant for the spring. Oregon Food Bank gave approval for volunteers to modify curriculum for an online format.

ACTION

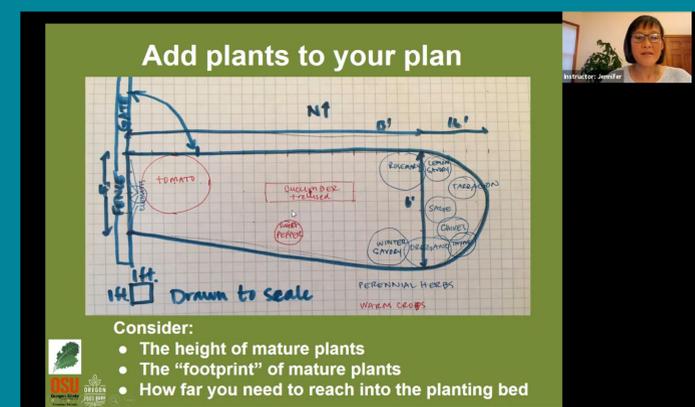
- Course was adapted to an online format within a few weeks of statewide stay home orders.
- Eight-week course condensed to four one-hour sessions held over two weeks.
- Topic included basics of gardening in the soil or in containers, composting and soil fertility, watering and caring for plants, managing pests, and enjoying produce.
- Taught on Zoom via lecture and discussion, video demonstrations of planting seeds and seedlings, a DIY garden design activity, and an insect identification game played as a Zoom poll.
- “Gardener goodies” including seeds, gloves, and course books were packaged and mailed to students.
- Taught by rotating groups of several volunteer instructors and program staff.
- Most volunteers had little experience with video conferencing. A few volunteers who are experienced users instructed others. Practice sessions were held for instructors.
- Lead volunteers and staff shared responsibilities for Zoom hosting, classroom management and presentation support.
- Participants were recruited through posters at food pantries and the social media of local partner organizations serving community members in need of basic resources.

OUTCOME

- 24 students signed up and an average of 15 students attended any given session, with most students attending at least two of the four sessions. Sessions were recorded for later viewing. At this writing, all sessions collectively had received over 250 views.
- Students were invited to log on early for questions and tech support. Then each instructor would lead their topic of the day with screen shared slides, followed by time for questions and sharing. Students were encouraged but not required to turn on their video. Most students chose to share questions and comments via chat, which was read by a moderator, who would then call on the student to speak if the topic needed further discussion. The class size was large enough that this invited feedback and interaction while keeping the sessions focused.
- Students responded actively to a poll and prompts to enter observations in the chat.
- The Master Gardener program in Curry County used the videos of *Seed to Supper @Home* to present the course to participants in their county, where it was well received and attended by 25 participants. Oregon Food Bank has shared videos of the class with partner organizations who are seeking this kind of resource at a time when OFB is focused primarily on emergency food distribution.
- Six students responded to a follow up survey and the feedback was mostly positive. Most students would have preferred a hands-on course but appreciated the opportunity to learn remotely when this was not an option. All respondents agreed strongly that they intended to grow some of their own food after taking the course.

INCLUSIVITY

- 21 of the 24 students enrolled self-reported meeting OFB guidelines for income to be eligible for food assistance. The course succeeded in serving people in need of improved food security and fulfilling guidelines set by OFB to serve at least 75% students meeting their income guidelines.
- By nature of being taught online, the class did not include learners with zero or limited internet access, who OFB has identified as being in even greater need. This digital divide is an inherent element of teaching online in a world of digital haves and have-nots, a challenge currently facing all educators and communities of learners. The digital divides needs resolution at a higher level.
- Demographic data was not collected, but in future we would invite students to share this information when enrolling.
- Some learners mentioned that the time and travel involved in a live course were prohibitive and they found the remote format more accessible.
- One participant shared that they are on the autism spectrum and appreciated how a virtual course met their learning needs in a way that a live course would not.
- One student who attended is Spanish-English bilingual and joined the online course after an in-person Spanish language version of the course was cancelled due to the pandemic. This participant was offered, and accepted, a coursebook written in Spanish.



In this screenshot from *Seed to Supper @Home*, Master Gardener volunteer Jennifer Klammer shares a sketch of a planting plan. Students could follow along in their course books to create their own plans. [Click to view the movie.](#)

LESSONS LEARNED

- Based on recommendations from OFB, volunteers are contemplating offering *Seed to Supper* in a conference call format accessible to people without internet, where learners receive their “gardener goodies” by mail and follow along in their course book for visuals. Audio recordings could then be available as a podcast that could be downloaded with limited bandwidth.
- A future update to *Seed to Supper @Home* online may include additional opportunities for student engagement such as added polls, prompts to enter ideas into chat, in-class sharing of garden plans, and more video demonstrations.
- Adding break-out sessions and additional time for students to introduce themselves could further build community.

EMPOWERING VOLUNTEERS

One valuable outcome of this project was informally empowering Master Gardeners to embrace online events. Volunteers who participated now have skills to support and generate online programming that keeps other volunteers, community members and stakeholders engaged at a time when live activities are limited. These volunteers are now actively seeking new opportunities to meet community needs with the challenges of the present moment.

RESOURCES

- [Watch now: Seed to Supper @Home](#)
- [Coursebook](#)
- [Seed to Supper program stretches limited food budgets](#)