

# Victory Gardens

Located in Back Bay Fens

Named after Richard D. Parker, an original organizer.

Established back in 1942. Parks date back to World War II.

Size: 357,397 ft<sup>2</sup>

During World War II, war gardening, Victory Gardens, provided American citizens an opportunity to assist with the war efforts. The gardens were planted in backyards, churchyards, city parks, and playgrounds, allowing Americans to plant and grow their own food. Hebert Hoover, head of the U.S. food administration during the war, was given the power to distribute, export, import, and store food. He was famously quoted, "Food will win the war". His initiatives encouraged Americans to produce more and consume less, dubbed "Hooverizing", which gave way to the use of victory gardens from 1943 to 1945. At their peak there were more than 20,000,000 Victory Gardens planted across the United States. By 1944 Victory Gardens were responsible for producing 40% of all vegetables grown in the United States. More than one million tons of vegetables were grown in Victory Gardens during the war.

The Fenway Victory Gardens in the Back Bay Fens of Boston, Massachusetts and the Dowling Community Garden in Minneapolis, Minnesota remain the only active surviving public examples from World War II. Most plots in the Fenway Victory Gardens now feature flowers instead of vegetables while the Dowling Community Garden retains its focus on vegetables.



Owners of the gardens are able to personalize their spaces.



Back Bay Fens located in the Fenway area of Boston near Fenway Park.



Aerial of multiple plots of gardens in the Victory Gardens

The Fenway Victory Gardens, located at the most north end of the Back Bay Fens, is still operated by local residents who maintain the fruits, vegetables, and flowers of 500 plots. Each resident pays a low annual fee of \$15-\$30 to keep the rights to their plot. Plots vary in size, roughly 15' by 25', with wide paths that divide the gardens into 4 large sections. Narrow lanes (sort of like alleys) giving access to interior gardens, and once you're in the interior, you'll forget you're in the city altogether. Each plot is fenced in creating a private spot within the vast open public space of the Back Bay Fens. The cultivator of the plot is allowed to plant whatever they like and use the space accordingly. You often find each plot adorned with items that reflect the caregiver's interests, energy, and lifestyle; making a walk through the park a unique experience.

As you stroll around and peer into the individual enclosures, you can see small ponds, fountains, lovely sculptures, benches and birdhouses, arbors and bowers, the occasional bee skep, and even

a cluster of hives. The Victory Gardens give you a glimpse into another world, or more accurately, 500 visions of paradise: a true utopia within the city boundaries.

Since the turn of the 21st century, interest in victory gardens has re-emerged and started growing. Campaigning efforts are promoting adding victory gardens to public spaces. Awareness is being spread through the use of victory garden websites and blogs. There has even been a national effort to re-establish a victory garden on the White House lawn. In March 2009, First Lady, Michelle Obama planted an 1,100-square-foot (100 m<sup>2</sup>) "Kitchen Garden" on the White House lawn, the first since Eleanor Roosevelt's, to raise awareness about healthy food. The great benefits of Victory Gardens are being realized for daily use.