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OSU Extension statewide seed giveaway returns for fifth year

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This news release is available online: <https://beav.es/qjP>

Photos: <https://flic.kr/p/2ptY5sP>, <https://flic.kr/p/2ptY6kk>

Video that describes the program: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I4NVSEBZu4>

CORVALLIS, Ore. – The Grow This! Oregon Garden Challenge, Oregon State University Extension’s statewide seed giveaway, has returned for a fifth year in 2024 featuring a continued partnership with the Oregon Bee Project.

Individuals and households, schools and groups can [sign up](#) to receive an individual/household seed kit, group kit or seed-starting teacher classroom kit through the mail.

The seed-starting classroom kits include a reusable grocery tote, stickers, foil pans, seed markers, a spray bottle and a peat pot for each child.

[The challenge](#) is spearheaded by Food Hero, a statewide initiative of the Oregon Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) program that was developed by OSU Extension in English and Spanish. This year’s goal is to mail seed kits to 3,600 individuals or households and enough classroom kits to reach over 40,000 classroom students and their teachers, said Lauren Tobey, Food Hero coordinator.

The seed giveaway has been growing since it started in 2020. In 2023, an estimated 122,500 Oregonians participated in the Grow This! Oregon Garden Challenge – an increase of 31% over the previous year. About 1,350 classroom kits were distributed to 419 schools, reaching 40,500 students. The program distributed 6,500 individual/household seed kits.

Of the returning participants from the 2023 challenge, 83% said they planted seeds and 92% reported an increase in using their garden harvest in a meal.

“We want to grow food together and share gardening tips and experiences to learn together,” Tobey said. “Food Hero’s bottom-line goal is to increase fruit and vegetable intake and access among all Oregonians.”

Throughout summer and 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](#).

The individual/household kits will include a seed for a flower and seeds for vegetables that can be made into a salad plus a pollinator friendly seed packet. As they have been in the past, the seeds were donated to Extension by Bi-Mart Stores Inc. The kits also include a bookmark with a link with guidance on how to plant the seeds, either in the ground or in a container.

The Grow This! Garden Challenge originated with a donation in 2019 of 800 seed packets from Bi-Mart. Mandy Hatfield, Extension nutrition educator for Douglas County, said the original intent was to provide seeds for school gardens across the state. In 2020, Bi-Mart donated more packets, precipitating the need to further expand the program.

Since it launched in 2008, Food Hero has been used in communities and schools across Oregon, building children's cooking skills through sharing the recipes and sampling new foods.

Food Hero recipes are tested according to criteria, such as overall flavor, color and texture. The meals are low-cost and feature easy to find ingredients, easy to follow instructions and minimal preparation time. Recipes and cooking tips are also shared through a Food Hero monthly publication in Spanish and English.

-30-

About OSU Extension: The Oregon State University Extension Service shares research-based knowledge with people and communities in Oregon's 36 counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. 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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