

April 1, 2020



Plant a Row for the Hungry—Why It Matters More Than Ever

By Robin Stanley

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

Imagine that you didn't have enough food to eat. What would that be like physically and emotionally? Unfortunately, many individuals and families on the West Slope experience this on a regular basis. In a letter to donors, James McDonough from the Upper Room stated, "Last year we served 55,983 meals to those in need. Our work is more in demand than ever—we are serving meals in record numbers. We could not have done this without your generosity and our great volunteers giving over 17,5230 hours." While you might not be able or willing to volunteer directly with an organization like the Upper Room, which serves a hot meal 365 days a year, sharing your extra produce can allow both you and them to do what each does best. That's where Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR) comes in. It's an international organization that encourages home gardeners to plant extra plants so they can donate their surplus to groups that serve the people in need of healthy and delicious food.

You may be wondering how that works. This is the 13th year that the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County have been the local resource for produce donations. You'll just need to go to our website for the link to the list of 11 food banks, food closets and agencies that would love to have you donate fresh fruits and veggies to them. Details on locations, times and contact information are all provided, including a map of the sites, which are located all over the West Slope, on our website at <http://par-edc.org/>.

Beginning last year, Master Gardeners hold a contest to see who will donate the most. Last year, it ran for 6 months, but this year, it will run from March 15, 2020 to December 31, 2020. The winner will receive a \$50 prize. If weighing your produce is too hard, just estimate the weight. After you donate, go on our website and enter your name, email address, what you donated, and the weight. Here's the link <http://ucanr.edu/par-edc-donations>.

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Last year, SHARE, a food closet supported by 10 local churches, provided food for 2788 local families. When I managed a community garden for Federated Church, where SHARE is located, I always told my fellow gardeners that if they were having a bad day, just show up at SHARE with some bags of tomatoes and the reaction will surely have you leaving with a smile on your face. When I asked clients why SHARE was important to them, a woman bringing two men said they are both disabled and on SSI and their monthly check doesn't go far enough to buy adequate food. Another woman had just been discharged from Marshall Hospital and had no place to go and could only eat soft food, so she was grateful to get what she needed, as well as some sympathy for her plight from the volunteers. Speaking of ways people will benefit from your donations, guests of the Upper Room told me that "theirs is the only hot meal I get all day," and "it's delicious and nutritious and I don't know what I would do without it." Just think how easily you can make a positive impact on people. Get growing!

An added note—as I write this, the COVID-19 coronavirus situation is unfolding. If any restrictions of food or produce donations are implemented, we will post them on the PAR website.

In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and recent California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, UCCE Central Sierra will cancel all El Dorado and Amador County Master Gardener public events and classes. This cancellation remains in effect through April 4th, and will be updated as public health guidelines change. We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. We will attempt to offer our cancelled classes and events at a future time if feasible; please refer to our website <http://ucanr.edu/edmg> which will be updated with the latest changes as they occur. Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.