

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Volunteer home gardeners needed this spring for getstarted—  
a neighbor-to-neighbor initiative to address food insecurity in Petaluma by  
promoting the practice of growing healthy food**

Launched last year in response to the pandemic-related increase in food insecurity, getstarted teams up again with Petaluma Bounty and welcomes the UCCE Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County to rally and support home gardeners in growing edible plant starts for neighboring families in need

**Online Volunteer Registration Deadline by March 31, 2021 at [getstarted.garden](https://getstarted.garden)**

**(March 8, 2021, Petaluma, CA)**—This spring, good grows from seed as getstarted gears up for its second season of connecting home gardeners to Petaluma families experiencing food insecurity. Launched in summer 2020 to link the pandemic-related boom in home gardeners with the sharp increase in people experiencing food insecurity, getstarted recruits and supports volunteer home gardener ‘Starters’ to grow edible plant starts for distribution, free of charge, to local families to tend, harvest and enjoy.

Volunteer Starters are needed now in order to meet the goal of distributing 300 plant start packs by late May through local food pantries including Petaluma Family Resource Center at McDowell Elementary School, Salvation Army Petaluma Food Pantry and the West Side Interfaith Pantry at Elim Lutheran Church.

This spring’s Start Kit seeds once again reflect the preferences of surveyed families receiving food assistance, combined with the expert advice of program partner Petaluma Bounty on which plants will grow successfully when transplanted. This spring will offer two different kits for families to choose—partial sun starts (cilantro, lettuce and onions) and full sun starts (cucumbers, green beans and summer squash).

Volunteers pick up free Start Kits at Petaluma Bounty Farm (55 Shasta Avenue) on Saturday and Sunday, April 3 & 4 with everything they need to grow viable starts from seed; and return their resulting Start Kits on Saturday and Sunday, May 8 & 9. Starts remain in their containers until they are distributed by getstarted, so volunteers do not need to have growing space to participate.

New this year is a collaboration with UCCE’s Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County to lend volunteer Starters online and phone support as questions or concerns arise throughout the 5-6 week germination and growth period of the seedlings. Master Gardeners are trained and certified University of California volunteers whose mission is to provide unbiased, high quality, science-based information to non-commercial home gardeners in Sonoma County. They have been providing technical assistance to home gardeners since 1981.

Interested participants can get more information and sign up by Wednesday, March 31 at [getstarted.garden](http://getstarted.garden).

One of the 75 volunteer Starters from last year, Leah Martinez of Petaluma saw in the project a unique pandemic-era educational opportunity for her children. “Being Starters was a great way to show my kids about where vegetables they know come from, as well as talk to them about building our community and supporting neighbors who need help right now with getting food,” she says. “Our starts weren’t perfect, but it was a meaningful and fun activity we all did together and something positive we’ll remember being part of during COVID.”

After delivering their plant starts back to the program, the Martinez family was thrilled to see all of the happy comments from the recipient ‘Growers’ on the **getstarted** website last fall as the plants took off and started to produce for the families and individuals who had taken them home from the pantries.

Ella T. wrote, ““The lettuce is fantastic and still growing! They were really healthy plants—the people who grew them really knew what they were doing. They did an excellent job, and it’s exciting to see them grow.”

Beverly S. commented, “The cilantro is doing great, and I’m making salsa a lot. The lettuce grew easily. It’s nice to have fresh vegetables right outside and not have to go get them at the store.” And Derrick N. said things were going so well that he was sharing his bounty with neighbors.

Food pantry managers were also delighted. “Our food pantry clients were surprised by the offer of free vegetable plants and touched when they heard that neighbors who cared about their situation took the time to grow them,” says Major Mitham Clement, Salvation Army Petaluma Corps Officer. “We are indeed grateful to **getstarted** who brought a unique, happy, and fresh component to the on-going, critical work we do, and we look forward to welcoming them back to share more plants and their thoughtful support for our community.”

**getstarted** is the brainchild of two Bay Area friends, Cara Storm and Susan Duncan, who love to garden and who both wondered if the pandemic-inspired boom of home gardeners could be tapped to benefit lower income community members experiencing food insecurity. Working with Petaluma Bounty, a farm-based community food security project whose mission is healthy food for everyone through collaboration, education and promoting self-reliance, they mapped existing resources and efforts. To ensure relevancy and effectiveness, **getstarted** and Petaluma Bounty surveyed more than 60 families on needs, preferences and interest. The pilot program last summer distributed 300 starter packs of broccoli, cilantro and lettuce to 255 families for fall and winter harvesting.

“After the summer program, it was clear we needed to continue—not only due to ever-increasing food insecurity—but given the overwhelming response from enthusiastic volunteers, requests from food pantries to return and the on-going appreciation from plant recipients,” says Storm, Director of

get**started**, a Petaluma resident and food pantry volunteer. “get**started** is both a symbol and a solution. Beyond the direct benefits of the program, we also saw equally meaningful ancillary ones—Starters experiencing the program as a highly personal way to volunteer safely during the pandemic, and Growers seeing something hopeful grow during a particularly challenging time. We’re looking forward to expanding the program’s impact and reach this spring.”

"Petaluma Bounty appreciates the care and consideration that get**started** has put into their program design and implementation," says Suzi Grady, Director of Petaluma Bounty. "Bounty Farm donates thousands of extra plants to community efforts each year, and we're glad that get**started** is focusing on relationship and capacity building of neighborhood gardening networks. Their efforts are providing another means for gardeners on limited incomes to grow their preferred varieties in a way that will leave all participants with more knowledge and investment in our local food system!"

get**started** in kind product sponsors include Friedman’s Home Improvement, Grab N ’Grow, Petaluma Seed Bank and Swallowtail Seeds.

#### About get**started**

get**started** is a timely, emergent initiative addressing the increased, pandemic-related food insecurity in our communities, mobilizing home gardeners to share edible plant starts with their neighbors in need. While the program depends on local growing seasons, it aims to promote increased knowledge of, and interest in, year-round edible gardening, and resulting on-going community resilience and civic engagement. With no cost to participate, either as a home gardener “Starter” or recipient “Grower,” the scalable, customizable program relies on collaboration and product donation from communities and partners supporting the proven concept and joyful results.

<https://www.getstarted.garden>

Instagram & Facebook at @getstarted.garden

#### Media Contact

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