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## **A new initiative rallies dozens of Petaluma home gardeners to grow edible plant starts for distribution this fall to local families experiencing food insecurity**

The timely effort, called **getstarted**, is the brainchild of two Bay Area women who wanted to grow a neighbor-to-neighbor solution for the increased demand on food pantries during the COVID-19 pandemic

(August 31, 2020, Petaluma, CA)—43-year-old Emma Logan was the first to respond when she received a notice in late July that a new initiative called **getstarted** was looking for local home gardeners to grow edible plant starts for Petaluma families in need. Passionate about growing food plants herself, she immediately recognized the unique opportunity to help her neighbors at a time when food insecurity is at an all-time high due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but she was stuck at home.

“Living in a place that has such a huge portion of our economy built around growing food, it is unacceptable that we have members of our community without true food security,” said Logan. “This gave me a tangible way to do something to help out other people in my community during the pandemic.”

Logan is one of 65 home gardeners who are currently tending a mixture of broccoli, lettuce, and cilantro sprouts, growing them from seed in six-pack start kits provided by **getstarted** and its partner Petaluma Bounty. The volunteer gardeners will return the young plants in early September, when the seedlings are established and viable, to then be distributed to families free of charge at local food pantries to take home, plant, and tend until harvest. The goal is to get all 300 start kits robustly growing and into the hands of food insecure families along with plant care instructions and information on other local food resources, in both English and Spanish.

“While these plants alone won’t serve to feed families, this neighbor-to-neighbor program both contributes to supplementing peoples’ immediate and future food needs with on-going, fresh,

nutritious produce, and also nurtures many new gardeners, who undoubtedly will experience the joys of growing some of their own food,” said Cara Storm, director of **getstarted**. “All of this leads to greater community connection and resilience.”

Storm, a resident of Petaluma, launched **getstarted** with her friend Susan Duncan, an avid Oakland gardener, who realized this past spring that she had more starts than she needed—in this case, zucchini plants. She wondered: what if the pandemic-inspired boon of home gardeners could share edible plants with lower income community members experiencing food insecurity?

The two women were determined to explore the idea and reached out to others doing related work in the area. They found an enthusiastic partner in Petaluma Bounty, a farm-based community food security project that opened its doors in 2008 and whose mission is healthy food for everyone through collaboration, education, and promoting self-reliance.

Together, they mapped existing resources and other efforts, went to local pantries with whom Petaluma Bounty has relationships, and surveyed more than 60 clients on their needs, edible plant preferences, and interest and ability to grow a plant.

“**getstarted** is a wonderful complement to Petaluma Bounty’s multi-faceted approach to addressing food insecurity in our community,” said Suzi Grady, director of Petaluma Bounty. “The idea is simple and powerful—leverage existing resources and skill sets of local gardeners to grow extra plants for gardeners on a limited income. By creating a network of gardeners to grow a few extra starts, we can expand others’ ability to grow their own food and start a deeper conversation of how to help one another. This is an idea that can take root in any community. I look forward to supporting **getstarted** into the future and seeing how this shared effort and network evolves.”

The opportunity to expand food gardening into families’ homes was the lure for 46-year-old Julia Luna, who is a school garden program manager in Petaluma, and took home 6 start kits to tend. “The children would come to school and experience time in their school garden which is great, but then they go home, and the continuation of healthy eating/growing/living is uncertain,” said Luna. “Starts given is a wonderful continuation to eating more healthily and allows families to understand that it is possible to do at home, affordably and easily.”

Ana Keller, Estate Director of Keller Estate wines, picked up 12 kits. A home gardener since high school, Keller was excited to see an initiative that spoke to her lifelong love of growing food and gardening. “I thought, if I could help another family get started along that path, to understand

the health value of food from the garden, great!” said Keller. “The Keller Estate is thrilled to be involved and happy to report that our plants are almost an inch tall already.”

“It’s been so uplifting to see the small seed of an idea bloom into such an enthusiastic response on so many levels,” said Duncan. “Petaluma Bounty saw this as another effective way to help address food insecurity. The amateur to expert home gardeners who signed up to tend kits feel like activists—some are involving their children and grandchildren, teaching them about growing as well as civic responsibility. And we look forward to the recipients enjoying the delight and pride of seeing food on the table that they’ve grown themselves. It’s a wonderful cycle we hope to see continue here in the spring growing season, and to help launch in other communities, given how scalable and culturally and geographically-customizable the program can be.”

**Volunteer gardeners will be returning the start plants on Sunday, September 6, the day of Petaluma Bounty’s inaugural fall plant sale, from 3:30 to 5:00pm. For more information about the plant sale, go to [petalumabounty.org](https://petalumabounty.org). The plants will then be distributed within a week through pantries at Elim Lutheran, Salvation Army, and McDowell Elementary.**

“Seeing seeds pop up and a plant offer its bounty is a beautiful sign of hope,” expressed Storm. “Especially now, this program feels like a meaningful way to build more human connection—during a time when we can’t necessarily connect in person—and as long as there are food lines, this program can lend a hand... and a green thumb.”

### **About getstarted**

getstarted 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>

### **About Petaluma Bounty**

A program of Petaluma People Services Center, Petaluma Bounty improves the quality of food offered by emergency food distributors through the Bounty Hunters gleaning program. We increase low-income consumers' purchasing power through local affordable food incentives such Market Match, sliding scale farm stands and CSA memberships, as well as maximize awareness and participation in federal food programs such as WIC, SNAP, and Meals on Wheels. We increase food literacy – knowledge of how food is grown and where it comes from – for children, youth and adults. We are working to change attitudes and appetites for healthy food and active lifestyles. We expand our community's capacity to grow its own food by supporting the construction of community gardens and empowering others by sharing our knowledge. And finally, we are engaging our whole community to become active, informed agents of change of their food system.

<https://www.petalumabounty.org>