

World War II: Home Front

There's a War on, You Know!

During the Second World War, people could not just walk into a shop and buy as much sugar or butter or meat as they wanted, nor could they fill up their car with gasoline whenever they liked. All these goods were rationed, which meant you were only allowed to buy a small amount (even if you could afford more). The government introduced rationing because certain goods were in short supply during the war, and rationing was the only way to make sure everyone got their fair share.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor dramatically ended the debate over America's entrance into the war that raged around the world. As eager volunteers flooded local draft board offices ordinary citizens soon felt the impact of the war. Almost overnight the economy shifted to war production. Consumer goods now took a back seat to military production as nationwide rationing began almost immediately. In May of 1942, the U.S. Office of Price Administration (OPA) froze prices on practically all everyday goods, starting with sugar and coffee.

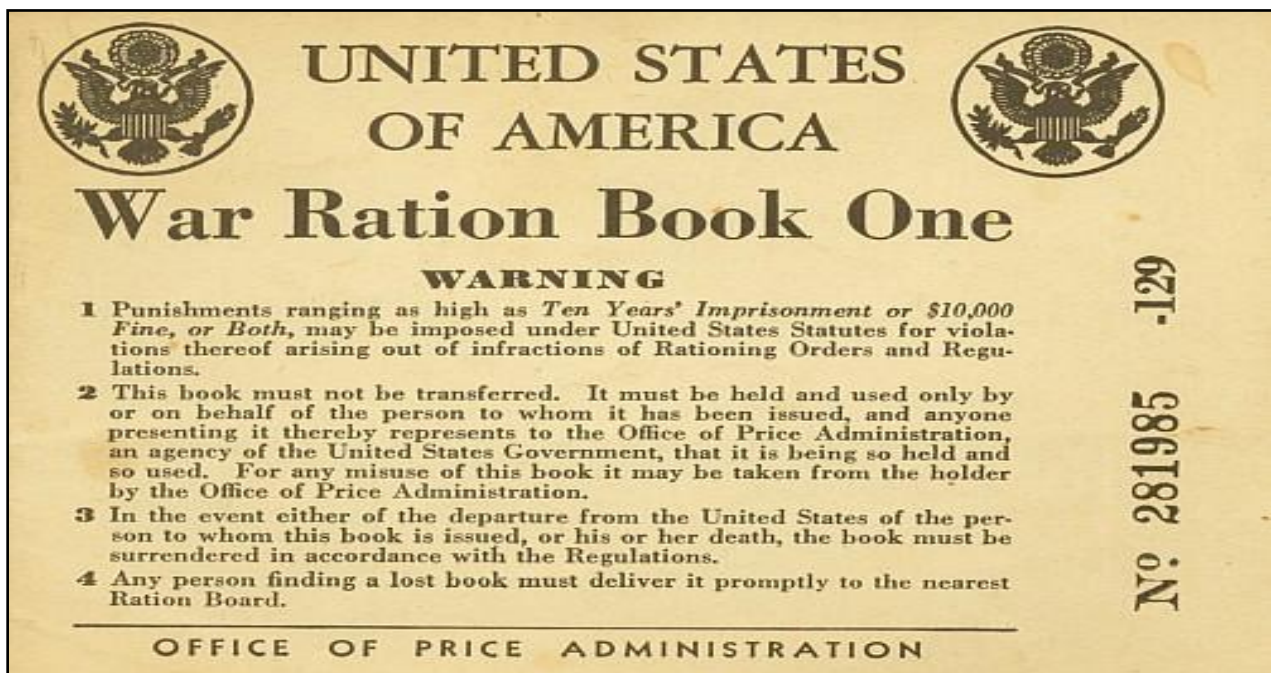
War ration books and tokens were issued to each American family, dictating how much gasoline, tires, sugar, meat, silk, shoes, nylon and other items any one person could buy. A *wartime edition* of the American Woman's Cook Book contained revised recipes and gave advice on dealing with food shortages.

1. What was wartime rationing?

2. Name **three** items rationed during WWII.

3. **Explain** why wartime rationing was necessary?

4. According to the Ration Book, what was the punishment for violating wartime rationing policies?



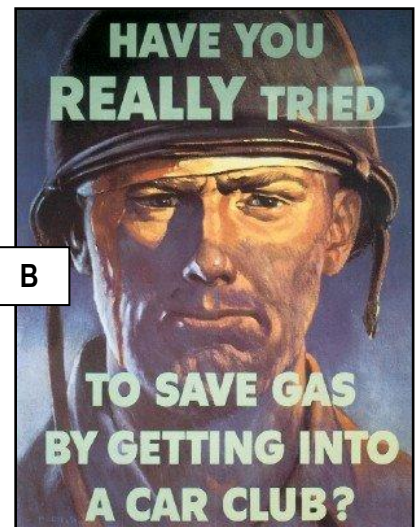
By the end of 1942, half of U.S automobiles were issued an 'A' sticker which allowed 4 gallons of fuel per week. That sticker was issued to owners whose use of their cars was nonessential. Hand the pump jockey your Mileage Ration Book coupons and cash, and she (yes, female service station attendants because the guys were *over there*) could sell you three or four gallons a week, no more. For nearly a year, A-stickered cars were not to be driven for pleasure at all.

The green 'B' sticker was for driving deemed essential to the war effort; industrial war workers, for example, could purchase eight gallons a week. Red 'C' stickers indicated physicians, ministers, mail carriers and railroad workers. 'T' was for truckers, and the rare 'X' sticker went to members of Congress and other VIPs. Truckers supplying the population with supplies had a T sticker for unlimited amounts of fuel.

The first nonfood item rationed was rubber. The Japanese had seized plantations in the Dutch East Indies that produced 90% of America's raw rubber. President Roosevelt called on citizens to help by contributing scrap rubber to be recycled, *old tires, old rubber raincoats, garden hose, rubber shoes, bathing caps.*

The OPA established the *Idle Tire Purchase Plan*, and could deny mileage rations to anyone owning passenger tires not in use. Voluntary gas rationing proved ineffective and by the spring of 1942 mandatory rationing was needed. To get your classification and ration stamps, you had to certify to a local board that you needed gas and owned no more than five tires.

The national maximum *Victory Speed* was 35 miles an hour, and *Driving Clubs* or carpools were encouraged. The main idea was to conserve rubber, not gasoline. The interior side of the sticker issued for the car's windshield instructed the driver on this point. Every citizen, military or civilian, was to do their part. Even in the popular Warner Brothers cartoons, Daffy Duck tells the audience to *Keep it under 40!*



5. The majority of Americans put an 'A' sticker on their windshield. How many gallons of gasoline did this sticker limit the driver?

6. The goal of rationing gasoline wasn't to ration gasoline. What resource was gasoline rationing suppose to actually ration? See poster 'c'

7. Why was the above resource so scarce during WWII?

8. Based on the passage, identify **two** ways the U.S. government encouraged citizens to ration the resource listed in question #6.

9. What are posters 'a' and 'b' encouraging Americans to do?

10. What does the cartoonist of cartoon 'a' mean when they say, "When you ride ALONE you ride with Hitler?"

Even before America's entry into World War II, and stretching over four years, a parade of scrap drives kept citizens busy. The drives started by collecting aluminum before moving into a wide range of products such as tires, paper, tin, household fats, and silk stockings. Through it all, Americans combined a strong community spirit with fierce competition to salvage countless tons of products vital to the American war effort. Salvaging represented yet another way that Americans could contribute to the war effort along with other wartime programs. And the process was once again driven by shortages of vital materials such as rubber, tin, and steel. In the overall effort, the conservation movement worked to reduce the consumption of war related materials; rationing attempted to fairly distribute the scarce commodities; and the salvage effort aimed to hunt down every last pound of material that could be used to win the war.

Government public relations campaigns spearheaded the effort to educate and mobilize every American to participate in scrap drives. As with the calls for conservation of valuable resources, officials persistently reminded citizens about how their seemingly inconsequential (small) contribution would become monumental when multiplied by the efforts of other citizens nationwide. For example, the amount of rubber salvaged from one old tire could provide 20 parachute troopers with boots or make 12 gas masks. A thousand old galoshes (rubber work boots) collected during a scrap drive could provide all of the rubber to make a medium-sized bomber.



galoshes

11. What materials were collected during WWII scrap drives?

12. According to the passage, **discuss** what wartime equipment could be made from salvaging rubber?



While a wide variety of scrap drives occurred over the years, those related to kitchen fats and scrap paper illustrated the general process involved. Kitchen fats and greases would seem, on the surface, to be odd materials to be fervently collecting in the midst of a world war, but officials had their reasons. The fats contained a significant amount of glycerine that could be used in explosives. Glycerine was valuable to the war effort in other ways too, including as an antiseptic, a medicinal solvent, in cellophane and glassine packaging, and as treatment for sunburn and other skin irritations.



13. What chemical could be used for the war effort from recycled kitchen fats?

14. Identify **five** wartime uses of this chemical.

15. How would an American get their fats to the frontlines of WWII?

The demands put on American industry by the war machine were immense. With some ten million men at war and the rest of the male population at work, it was clear the only way America would be able to win the war was if it enlisted large numbers of women for employment. America needed its women to go to work to build the planes, tanks, and ships needed to fight Hitler. World War II, more so than any other war, was a war based on production, and so it was time to bring American women into industry.



During World War II, the U.S. government teamed up with industry, the media, and women's organizations in an effort to urge women to join the labor force by telling women it was their "patriotic duty" to go to work.

Women were constantly being reminded that their husbands, sons, and brothers were in danger because they were not receiving the supplies they needed. Slogans such as "Victory is in Your Hands," "We Can Do It!," and "Women the War Needs You!" were all used to convince women that their country's need was more important than their individual need.

As a result of the propaganda American women, whether they were motivated by patriotism, economic benefits, independence, social interaction, or necessity, joined the workforce at never before seen rates. In July 1944, when the war was at its peak over 19 million women were employed in the United States, more than ever before.



16. Using examples from the passage, why were American women urged to join the workforce?

17. Using examples from the passage, how did the government motivate women to work?

"One front and one battle where everyone in the United States - every man, woman, and child - is in action. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives."

**-U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt,
in address to the nation,
April, 1942**

Victory Gardens

As part of the war effort, the government rationed foods like sugar, butter, milk, cheese, eggs, coffee, meat and canned goods. Labor and transportation shortages made it hard to harvest and move fruits and vegetables to market. So, the government turned to its citizens and encouraged them to plant "Victory Gardens." They wanted individuals to provide their own fruits and vegetables.

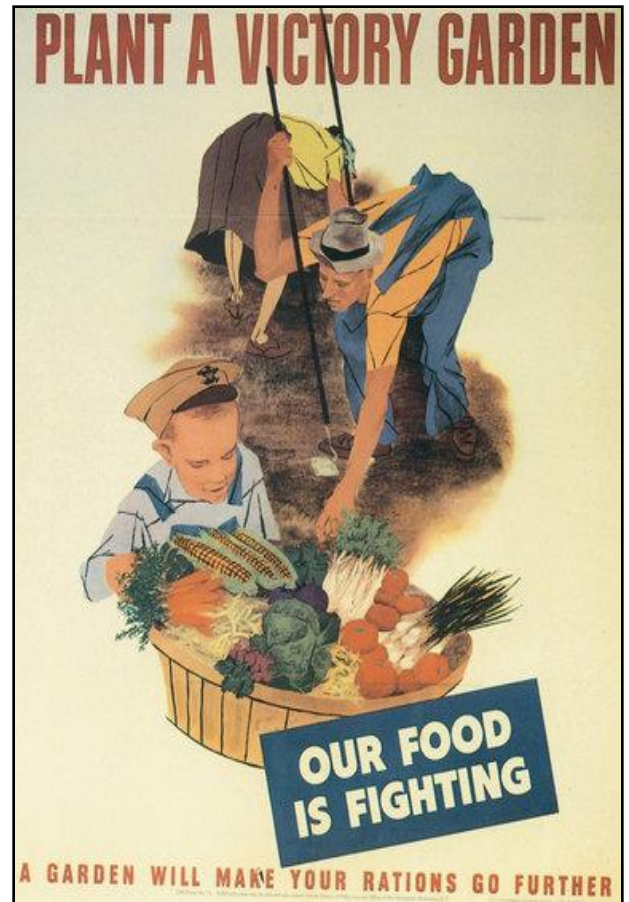
Nearly 20 million Americans answered the call. They planted gardens in backyards, empty lots and even city rooftops. Neighbors pooled their resources, planted different kinds of foods and formed cooperatives, all in the name of patriotism.

The result of victory gardening? The US Department of Agriculture estimates that more than 20 million victory gardens were planted. Fruit and vegetables harvested in these home and community plots was estimated to be 9-10 million tons, an amount equal to all commercial production of fresh vegetables. So, the program made a difference.

Kelly Holthus remembers that it was hard to find fresh produce, and it was a way for individuals to do their part on the home front. "It was a great moral thing," he says. "And for young people like me, it was, you know, I could do my part. I was a part of the effort!"

When World War II ended, so did the government promotion of victory gardens. Many people did not plant a garden in the spring of 1946, but agriculture had not yet geared up to full production for grocery stores, so the country experienced some food shortages.

18. What is President Roosevelt's main point in this quotation?



19. Explain why the U.S. government wanted American citizens to grow gardens during World War II?

20. Was victory gardening a success? Use details that support your answer.
