

dwell

AT HOME IN THE MODERN WORLD

Backyard Modern
Additions That Work

Global Chilling
Our Expert Reviews
Efficient Refrigerators

Renovate! Reuse! Recycle!

Breathing New Life Into Old Buildings



April 2007
\$4.99 U.S. / \$6.99 Canada

dwell.com

Our 50th Issue!
50 more to 100



0 70992 35055 1

Project: Edible Estates
Regional Prototype Garden #2
Location: Lakewood, California

The Fotis made friends with neighbors by giving away some of the surplus the new garden (below left) produced. Lucky locals walked away with natural delicacies such as white beauty eggplants, Brandywine tomatoes, lemon cucumbers, kum-

quats, apricots, pears, purple sage, rosemary, and thyme. The various stages of development unfold (bottom) in the Southern California suburb, illustrating the stark transformation from everyday turf to extraordinary vegetation.



That's not the case for Jennifer and Michael Foti of Lakewood, California, a quintessential suburb on the southern edge of Los Angeles. After reading about Edible Estates on treehugger.com, Michael, a 37-year-old computer programmer, emailed Haeg. "Our lawn is flat, gets plenty of sunlight, and is totally pesticide-free. It's also one of the brownest on the street, as my wife refuses to waste water on it," he wrote.

The Fotis were among nearly 40 candidates Haeg considered during his seven-month search for the second installment of his project. They were a perfect fit. Not only was Michael an experienced and eager gardener, his thoughtful and articulate demeanor made him a good spokesperson for the project.

And so during Memorial Day weekend last year, the Edible Estates team of 12 volunteers planted the 20-by-38-foot space with a dizzying amalgam of more than a hundred vegetables, fruits, and herbs. (Haeg covered the cost of all the planning and materials.)

Despite a few initial eyebrow raisings, Michael says, the garden was a hit. As a result Haeg has even gone so far as to trademark the name, now officially referred to as Edible Estates, a Gardenlab project by Fritz Haeg. Of course, it didn't hurt that each person who passed by walked away with produce. "I knew that I was going to have a lot more food than I could realistically eat, so it was very important to me that I give away as much as possible." Even so, the Fotis were still left with a hefty surplus. So besides canning and preserving, Jennifer started cooking Greek food to make use of all the tomatoes and eggplants.

"Flip through any Greek cookbook with a decent number of pictures and you're instantly aware that tomatoes and eggplants are 50 percent of the ingredients," she says. And when they tired of moussaka, Jennifer whipped up Indian recipes like masala green beans ▶



Project: Edible Estates
 Regional Prototype Garden #1
Location: Salina, Kansas

The first iteration of the Edible Estates project was initiated on July 4, 2005, at the home of Stan and Priti Cox in Salina, Kansas (below left). A free informational booklet with resources and recommendations was produced to aid local

residents interested in converting their own lawns. The Salina Art Center sponsored and commissioned the project, and an exhibition with design drawings and photos documenting the progress (bottom) were put on display.



with fenugreek and bhagan bharta, an eggplant dish. It was, however, her grandmother's "Chicago Hots," a relish made with cherry tomatoes, celery, bell pepper, and onion that turned out to be the most popular.

But for all the culinary rewards the little garden has provided, Michael is equally passionate about its potential to build community. "I oftentimes feel like we live in a society disconnected from one another and from our food," he says. "I'm really interested in using the garden as a bridge rather than a moat."

The Fotis' mini-farm has garnered more attention than they ever anticipated. But unlike the legions of radical de-lawners ready to overtake suburbia with their sod cutters, neither the Fotis nor Haeg have any desire to cram this agenda down people's throats. Says Michael, "I didn't want the message to my neighbors to be that lawns are bad and if you have one you're a bad person."

Haeg, who spent every weekend of his childhood mowing the front lawn, says Edible Estates "isn't really so much about the actual plant material but the bigger global issues of food production and human interaction." In a country where produce travels an average of 1,000-plus miles from field to plate, shifting to grow-your-own will not only help reduce energy consumption and combat environmental degradation, it'll also give neighbors a reason to get to know one another.

It's this message that Haeg hopes to spread to a broader audience; there's already interest for another project on the periphery of New York City. Through gallery exhibits, how-to pamphlets, a video, and a coffee-table book tentatively titled *Edible Estates: Attack on the American Front Lawn* to be published in spring 2008, Haeg wants to convince Americans to do more mulching than manicuring. Over the next four to five years, he plans to convert seven more lawns, and hopefully many more people. ■



The Lawn Good-bye

Artist Fritz Haeg is trying to change the way we look at our lawns and illustrate how we might make better use of them. Michael and Jennifer Foti's once unproductive front yard (below) gets a makeover.

We sunbathe, picnic, and play sports on them. Our bare feet seem inexorably drawn to them. And for many of us, they're the first thing we see when we step out the front door: lawns. It's no surprise they cover 40 million acres in the U.S., or that we spend more caring for them than the entire GDP of Costa Rica.

Yet despite their attendant pleasures, these patches of viridian splendor leave much to be desired. Sucking up close to 240 gallons of water per person each day of the growing season, our beloved lawns are gradually depleting our natural water sources. Layer on the toxic soup of chemicals used to sustain them, and you can't help wondering if we should use the earth for something more productive.

Fritz Haeg thinks so. The 37-year-old Los Angeles artist is the mastermind of Edible Estates, an ongoing art/gardening project that transforms a typical suburban front lawn into an organic garden. Haeg launched the

project on July 4, 2005, in Salina, Kansas.

The location wasn't a random choice. Responding to the divisions he saw within the country following the 2004 election, Haeg wanted to help patch things up by working in the geographic center of the United States. After discussions with Stacy Switzer, curator of Grand Arts, a nonprofit art space and studio in Kansas City, Haeg got the idea for a lawn-to-garden project. "I really wanted to help people realize that they have a choice to make about how they use their land. Lawns are so pervasive and ubiquitous that we don't really see them anymore," he says. Americans spend more than 30 billion dollars on lawn care each year just to keep up with the Joneses.

Haeg sees our lawn lust as a symbolic demonstration of wealth and prosperity; for many the quest for the perfect postage stamp of curbside green has become as natural as cranking up the thermostat in the winter. ▶

