

**11 TIPS TO START YOUR GARDEN EARLY**

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# Eat Your Lawn

Plan a garden that's beautiful to look at  
and contains delicious treats for the dinner table.

**GROWING A LAWN**, spraying it with valuable water so it will grow taller, cutting it down with a gas-driven mower, and carting trimmings off to the dump where it will create a disposal problem doesn't make sense to author Rosalind Creasy.

With her 1982 book, *The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping*, she became "godmother" of a movement to turn lawns into sources of food. A revised edition is set to hit bookstores in 2010.

Her thoughts are now being echoed by experts from other fields, like architect Fritz

Haeg. As he sees it, "the 'hyper-manicured lawn' is looking increasingly out of date. ... Today, amid rising fuel costs, food safety scares and growing environmental awareness, a chemically treated and verdant but nutritionally barren lawn seems wasteful."

In 2005, Haeg started a project to create "Edible Estates" in nine U.S. growing climates. In each region, he proposes working with a family to turn their lawn into an "edible estate." His first venture was in Salina, Kansas, and is recorded along with stories of other gardens in *Edible Estates: Attack*





The harvest from the Edible Estate at Descanso Gardens in La Cañada Flintridge, California. PHOTO: COURTESY DESCANSO GARDENS

*on the Front Lawn*. The book also contains charts showing what will grow in different areas and when to plant.

Throughout most of 2008, another Haeg project was featured at Descanso Gardens, a 150-acre botanical garden in La Cañada Flintridge, California, 14 miles from downtown Los Angeles.

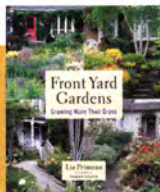
Haeg, along with Brian Sullivan, a horticulturist at Descanso, set up a basic frame of a house with a front lawn on one side and an edible garden on the other. It is a working demonstration area located just inside the gardens' entrance.

Comparing expenses for lawns and edible gardens had Creasy taking out her calculator.

"I started doing research on how much energy, work and money the average American lawn takes, and I was appalled," she says. In front of her home in Los Altos, California, Creasy created a test garden.

"I took a 100-square-foot bed, 5 feet wide and 20 feet long, and in it I put two tomato plants, two hills of zucchini, six bell pepper plants and four basil.

"At \$1.09 a pound for organic in my local grocery store, that's about \$120 for

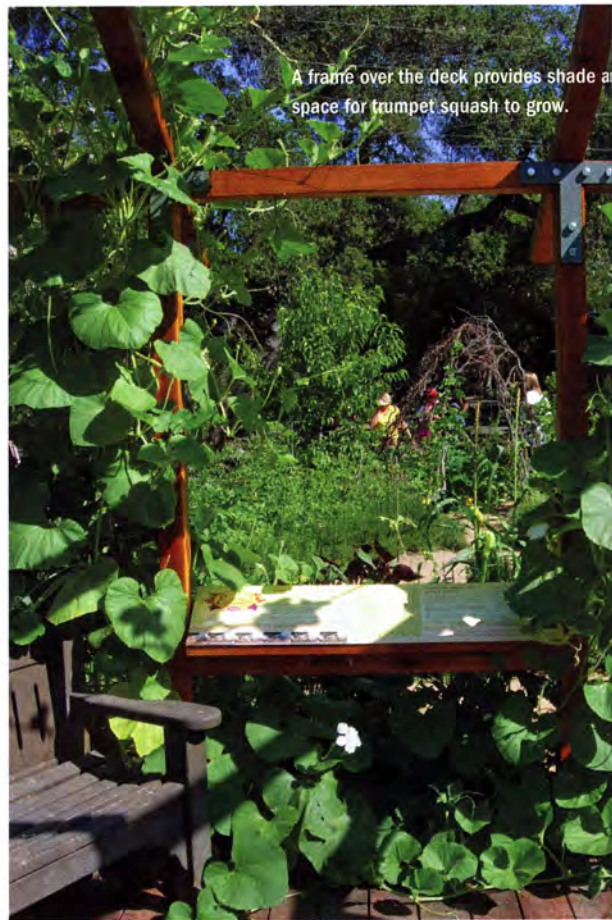


To order the books mentioned in this article, see Page 75.

zucchini. I got six green bell peppers and nine giant red, orange and yellow bell peppers. They were \$1.50 to \$2 apiece. I've already made pesto twice from the basil, and I'm up to 25 pounds of tomatoes. By the time the garden is finished growing, there will be at least \$500 in produce, and seeds were only \$3.20. It's a pretty little garden. We figure it averages about an hour a week (of) work (over a 3-month period)."

With Creasy's figures in mind, the gardener can begin her or his planning. Among the many points to consider is sunlight. Marta Teegen, a noted garden designer in Los Angeles, says, "You need a minimum of six hours of direct light a day to grow fruits and vegetables. Certainly you have watering concerns. It's also important to think about what you like to eat, how often you cook at home, and how many people are at home for meals."

In addition to these concerns, Haeg has others: What's your lawn's history? Are raised beds needed? Where are the shady and sunny areas? How will you spend time in the garden? What kind of permanent structure or trees will you have? What views do you want to focus on, or hide? Can you plan



A frame over the deck provides shade and space for trumpet squash to grow.

## FOR MORE INFO

**Descanso Gardens**

[www.DescansoGardens.org](http://www.DescansoGardens.org);  
818-949-4200 (automated),  
818-949-4290 (direct number)

**Seed Savers**

[www.SeedSavers.org](http://www.SeedSavers.org);  
563-382-5990  
\$35 one-year membership, \$30 for those on fixed income

**National Gardening Association**

[www.Garden.org](http://www.Garden.org),  
search for "Edible Landscaping"  
column by Charlie Nardozzi;  
802-863-5251

Watch [YouTube.com](http://YouTube.com) videos:

- "Edible Estates Regional Prototype Garden #2, Lakewood, CA"
- "Sustaining LA-Edible Estaters @ Descanso Gardens"
- "Some People Trading Lawns for Veggie Gardens"

to grow vertical for "higher yields"? How will you determine which mulch to use?

Besides all these considerations, it is important to check for laws/restrictions pertaining to lawns in your location.

Creasy, a landscape designer herself, says, "If you want a beautiful landscape, use the same design rules (as) for anything else. Short plants in the front, taller ones in the back. Put in small flowers for color. You need something that gives the yard structure, like a painted wood fence, several potted plants, steps or perennials. Fruit trees and vines provide a good armature for the garden.

"It's important to think about color repetition of plants. If I have four tomato plants, and I put two on either side, in front of them I put red verbena to pick up the color of the red tomatoes. And then, make a border with chives and parsley. And in the middle, flowering plants and bell peppers. Now, I'm beginning a design. Planting anything, anywhere, looks like hodgepodge," she says.

For an in-depth look at designing, *Front Yard Gardens, Growing More Than Grass* by Liz Primeau is a thorough guide to a splendid collection of gardens. Although it is primarily for nonedible gardens, it provides helpful planning tips.

While designing, keep in mind which

plants are attractive. Teegen recommends artichokes, multicolored lettuce, rainbow chard and Japanese red pumpkin. Haeg adds pomegranates and persimmon trees to that list, but he says "almost everything is beautiful at some point."

Edible ground covers can help make use

of spaces between plants. Creasy has an herb garden with thyme, lemon, lime, caraway, short chamomile and, at either end, strawberries. Teegen also suggests edible flowers as a design element.

For very small gardens, potted plants may be the way to go.

Creasy recommends *McGee & Stuckey's Bountiful Container* by Rose Marie Nichols McGee and Maggie Stuckey, a detailed compilation – including 17 kinds of tomatoes and 21 types of beans – of how to plant edibles.

You can cut expenses by saving seeds. But, as Teegen says, "saving the seeds is labor intensive." Creasy recommends Seed Savers, an organization formed to keep heirloom varieties alive. "You can get the catalog and order seeds. If you are a member, you can trade seeds with people from all over the country."

Once you are ready to begin, the basic steps are set out in Haeg's *Edible Estates*: Do a soil test, remove the lawn, use a rototiller, add amendments, mark out the plan, and water. Then watch for abundant gifts for your table.

— Libby Platus



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Get tips from the experts on tools of the garden design trade.



A shiny eggplant also offers a spot of color in an edible landscape.



The Edible Estate includes the sight and smell of German chamomile.



An edible landscape would be incomplete without Swiss chard on the menu. PHOTOS: COURTESY DESCANSO GARDENS (4)