

AS LOCAL AS IT GETS: GROW YOUR OWN FOOD

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CAROL VENOLIA

beautiful enough to EAT

If the sun shines on your outdoor space—
whether a tiny balcony or a large yard—
you can have an edible landscape.



Rosalind Creasy designed the Author's Garden, part of the Heartland Harvest Garden—the nation's largest edible landscape garden—at Powell Gardens outside Kansas City, Missouri.

PHOTO COURTESY POWELL GARDENS

Cucumbers and bunching onions shine at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

PHOTO COURTESY CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN



The vegetable garden at Buckingham Palace provides carrots, leeks, tomatoes, sweet corn and other fresh produce for the Royal Household Kitchen.

PHOTO BY JOHN STILLWELL

If I told you that one activity could make you healthier, improve the quality of your food, conserve fossil fuels, strengthen your community, increase biodiversity, help children understand that food *does* grow on trees, and restore your sense of connection with the natural world, would you be interested? I have two words: edible landscaping.

Edible landscaping means using attractive, food-producing plants in a well-designed garden, rather than using solely ornamental plants or planting food crops in utilitarian layouts. An edible landscape can be created in any style, and it can incorporate a mix of edible and ornamental plants.

The standard American “lawn, shrubs and shade tree” yard may provide a certain visual satisfaction, but it does virtually nothing to feed people or to provide a habitat for other critters. By contrast, an edible landscape offers fresh, affordable food, a variety of blooming plants, ever-changing seasonal surroundings, plus provides a home and sustenance for bees, butterflies and birds.

“People want to reduce their carbon footprint, get unhooked from industrial farming and eat food that didn’t travel 1,500 miles to the table.”



Sage, chives and parsley surround a mound of other herbs in this Baltimore, Maryland, edible garden designed by Fritz Haeg. PHOTO BY FRITZ HAEG

An ancient idea

Ancient Persian gardens celebrated plants’ edible and ornamental virtues. Medieval monasteries supported a rich array of vegetables, flowers, fruits and medicinal herbs and, until the 19th century, suburban English yards combined edible and decorative elements.

But as agriculture developed, food production became a working-class practice. In *Edible Estates*, Fritz Haeg writes that purely ornamental landscapes came to symbolize wealth and nobility, while food plants were relegated to unseen areas. “To grow food plants around your house 150 years ago implied that you didn’t have the means to pay someone to do it for you,” says Charlie Nardozzi, senior horticulturist for the National Gardening Association.

In the early 1970s, the nascent environmental movement—combined with a fuel crisis and a surge of interest in self-sufficiency—gave rise to a new interest in growing food at home. With the help of Rodale Press, an organic gardening movement began to gain traction. In the 1980s, two seminal books on edible landscaping—Rosalind Creasy’s *The Complete*

Book of Edible Landscaping and Robert Kourik’s *Designing and Maintaining Your Edible Landscape Naturally*—launched a new trend. Today, kitchen gardens are seeing a renaissance. Within that, edible landscaping is tapping deep roots. “The whole atmosphere around edible landscaping is different now,” Creasy says. “There’s tremendous momentum.”

Why we love edibles

Whether to save money or provide better-quality food for their families, Americans are more interested than ever in growing their own food, Creasy says. “People want to reduce their carbon footprint, get unhooked from industrial farming and eat food that didn’t travel 1,500 miles to the table. And they value vegetables now, which wasn’t always the case.”

At the same time, we have more varieties of attractive edible plants available than ever before. “Twenty years ago, you couldn’t obtain heirloom plants unless you were a member of the Seed Savers Exchange,” Creasy says. “Now we have heirloom apples, tomatoes, melons—varieties that the public is realizing they’ve been denied for decades.” Inspired by this



Hyssop blooms beneath Niagara grapes.
PHOTO COURTESY POWELL GARDENS

SMALL BUT FRUITFUL

The Ohio State University Extension offers the following tips for getting the most produce from a small space.

- Put herb pots on the patio.
- Include cherry tomatoes in a window box or hanging basket.
- Build a grape arbor.
- Grow nasturtiums, violas, borage or calendula to use in salads.
- Plant a fruit tree in the corner of your yard.
- Grow Red Jewel cabbage.
- Plant colorful peppers such as Lipstick or Habanero alongside flowers.
- Tuck lettuce, radishes or other short-lived greens into a flower bed.
- Replace a barberry hedge with gooseberries.
- Plant basil with coleus in a planter.
- Try attractive yellow or "rainbow" chard.
- Grow chives around the mailbox.
- Train raspberries up your fence.

surge of interest, Creasy is thoroughly revising *Edible Landscaping* for re-release this spring.

Newer and unusual fruits and vegetables allow you to choose plants specifically suited to your site and needs, Nardozzi says. "Some of the variety comes from breeding, some from heirloom seeds, and some by the introduction of species from other continents," he says. He's intrigued by newly available dwarf fruit trees that let you "fit a lot of stuff in a small yard."

Start small

In any gardening endeavor, it's good to start small. Half-barrels make perfect starter containers for edible landscaping, Creasy says. Nardozzi recommends making small changes to standard lawns over time. You can replace sections of the lawn with an edible groundcover such as strawberries; plant a fruit or nut tree where you might have planted a standard shade tree; grow a climbing grape instead of an unproductive vine; or place a berry, currant or hazelnut bush where an inedible shrub once stood.

Design rules

Design is what separates edible landscaping from normal vegetable gardening (a fine thing in itself). "If I just put vegetables in rows," Creasy says, "my eye goes down the row and out—like driving down the highway. But if I take that same plot, open up a space in the middle for a special plant, curve all the paths around the center like a rainbow, maybe put a bench at the back with a trellis over it for runner beans and some morning glories, and add a few flowers, that is now much more than a vegetable garden—it's an ornamental edible landscape. It's going to please your eye and draw you out into the yard, not just to harvest but to experience the garden."



Dwarf peach trees, thyme and oregano offer lots of flavor in little space. PHOTO COURTESY POWELL GARDENS



EAT YOUR DAYLILIES!

Daylilies open for just a day. Their botanic name, *hemerocallis*, is a Greek word translating to “beautiful for a day.”

DAYLILY BUD SAUTÉ

2 dozen daylily buds
1 clove garlic, finely minced
¼ cup olive oil
3 eggs
½ cup flour
Salt and pepper
Dash of nutmeg
1 teaspoon milk (if needed)

1. Cut base off buds.
2. Sauté garlic in a small amount of olive oil.
3. Beat eggs and mix enough flour to make a thin batter. Add sautéed garlic, ⅛ teaspoon each of salt and pepper, and nutmeg. Add a teaspoon of milk if batter is too thick.
4. Dip buds in batter and sauté until golden brown.

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Design tips

- An edible landscape should incorporate traditional landscape design values:
- Create primary and secondary focal points.
- Use plantings and hardscaping (such as paths and patios) to define spaces for various uses and experiences.
- Work consciously with color, texture and seasons of blooming and fruiting when choosing your garden’s palette.
- Pay attention to how you lead the eye from one part of the garden to another.
- Except for featured specimen plants, create groupings of plants to avoid a busy, random appearance.
- Explore the aesthetic potential of plants: Grow vines on arbors; create edible landscape walls with vines and shrubs; espalier fruit trees; use containers as accents; grow decorative borders of edibles.
- Make plants do double duty by shading your house in summer and admitting sunshine in winter, reducing your home’s energy use.

Fit for a queen: sources of inspiration

In 2009, the Queen of England had an organic edible landscape installed at Buckingham Palace. Laid out in concentric circles with a bean tipi in the center, the garden includes heirloom species of beans, lettuce, tomatoes and other edibles.

Creasy has created a large edible landscape garden at Powell Gardens in Kansas City, Missouri (www.powellgardens.org). Hers is part of the new 12-acre Heartland Harvest Garden, the nation’s largest edible landscape. Creasy also recommends visiting “one of the best established edible landscapes” in this country at the Chicago Botanic Garden (www.chicagobotanic.org).

For more inspiration, explore Village Homes, a development in Davis, California, where edibles play an integral role in landscape design (www.villagehomesdavis.org). Check out Fritz Haeg’s Edible Estates program (www.edibleestates.org), in which he transforms lawns all over the country into productive environments.

RESOURCES

FURTHER READING

Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn
by Fritz Haeg et al.

Edible Landscaping: Now You Can Have Your Gorgeous Garden and Eat it Too
by Rosalind Creasy

Gaia’s Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture
by Toby Hemerway

Landscaping with Fruit: Strawberry ground covers, blueberry hedges, grape arbors, and 39 other luscious fruits to make your yard an edible paradise
by Lee Reich

Landscaping with Fruits and Vegetables
by Fred Hagy

WEBSITES

ROSALIND CREASY
www.rosalindcreasy.com

CHARLIE NARDOZZI
www.garden.org/ediblelandscaping

EDIBLE ESTATES
www.edibleestates.org

KITCHEN GARDENERS INTERNATIONAL
www.kitchengardeners.org

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