

How to landscape with edible plants

You can get twice as much from your garden with half the work!
By Marion Owen, Fearless Weeder for PlanTea, Inc. and Co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul*.
www.plantea.com/edibleland.htm

Have you ever wanted to get more out of your garden? You can, by landscaping with *edible* plants. Edible landscaping, especially when paired with organic gardening practices, enhances any yard, garden or landscape. Is that great, or what? Edible landscaping can turn any growing space, large or small, into an incredible, edible resource!

If the idea of edible landscaping sounds a little far-fetched, you're not alone. Until recently, such applications were limited to apple orchards and quiet rows of raspberries. Yet, edible landscaping dates back to the gardens in ancient Egypt where flowers, grape arbors, vines and fruit trees were blended with places to sit and enjoy the scenery. By the Renaissance era though, things changed. Gardens became more formal and segregated as gardeners planted herbs, orchards and vegetables in separate areas. Mixing and matching edibles with other plants became a thing of the past, at least for a while.

Then came the 1970s and edible landscaping experienced a comeback as people strived to do more with their land. Sales of fruit-bearing shrubs and trees, and the popularity of herbs reflected the renewed interest. The introduction of unusual vegetables to the home gardener by seedsmen like Renee Shepherd of Renee's Garden has also played a big role in how we arrange our gardens.

Today, edible landscaping is alive and well in warm climates as well as cool ones. The combinations are endless. Uncommon fruit trees such as quince, persimmon, and pawpaw can enhance the most bland and stubborn landscape. That said, let's not forget the common but often overlooked edibles. Like rhubarb or gooseberries. European gardeners and gourmets have appreciated gooseberries for years, and in North America, gardeners are re-discovering gooseberries as a worthy home fruit. With small, maple-like leaves that blush nicely in the fall, gooseberries look well in borders and foundation plantings, and they can also be espaliered. As for flavor, the berries have been likened to kiwi, grapes and even tart apples, which makes them suitable for jams, wine, catsup and as a sauce baked with chicken or seafood.

More overlooked varieties include globe artichokes, red, black and white currants, which can be trained into attractive, compact hedges. Rhubarb too, with its bold red stalks and crinkly green leaves, is a show-stopper. And at the table, rhubarb recipes are also show-stoppers. Rainbow chard and the rich tones of Russian red kale add bursts of color to any grouping. And don't forget chives, fennel, thyme, lady's mantle, and other herbs. They deserve to be looked at in a whole new way.

How to get started

If you've moved into a new home, then you have the luxury of starting from scratch. Just remember Landscape Rule Number One: Start with the "bones" by planting trees and shrubs first, then follow with smaller plants. But what if your yard is already established? Your task is equally as easy. Simply incorporate edible plants as you make changes.

Begin by preparing your soil, enhancing it with compost, mulch, kelp or manure if necessary. (Organic materials improve **all soils** by adding structure and nutrition, and balancing the soil pH.) Then plant a few vegetables and herbs among your annual flowers. At the same time, let go of the habit of planting everything in nice neat, mono-cropped rows. They'll do just fine inter-planted (mixed) with ornamentals and herbs. In fact, inter-planting different plant families keeps pests at bay. Large groupings of broccoli and lettuce for example, attract concentrations of pests, while inter-planting tends to confuse them.

TIP: If your shrubs, trees, annuals or perennials wilt or become stressed from transplant shock, studies show that one of the best ways to give them a boost is to spray them with a kelp-fish foliar spray.

Out with the old, in with the new (edibles)

If you are faced with removing a tree that has died or outgrown its site, consider replacing it with a fruit-bearing one. Apples, currants, blueberries, Oregon grape (mahonia), raspberry, tayberry, red huckleberries, crabapples, plums, and cherries are just a few of the possibilities that provide color, texture, as well as food. And another tip: to put the forces of Nature in your favor, time your garden efforts, such as transplanting and pruning, to the phase of the moon. It works and it certainly can't hurt.

Short on space? Consider planting in containers. Or how about reducing the size of your lawn? Shaving just a few inches of turf is hardly noticeable, yet it can be just the space you need to add a clump of herbs. Larger patches can be replaced with an edible ground cover such as strawberries or low-profile herbs. Strawberries tolerate marginal soils and light shade, plus they produce fruit through most of the summer. Dwarf dogwood (also called bunchberry), and herbs such as thyme and oregano maintain a low profile as handsome ground covers.

Some tasty edible landscaping combos Need ideas? Seed packets, books, magazines, garden centers and mail-order catalogs can help get the creative juices flowing. Let your imagination wander. Plant a border of lettuce, chives, green onions, pansies, and parsley along the edges of raised beds. Grow tall plants like dill, daylilies, fennel, valerian, peas, edible chrysanthemum, corn and beans in the back of beds or in the centers of containers. Consider shapes, too. Globe artichokes, garlic and sunflowers have showy tops; cherry tomatoes can show off in tubs or along a fence. Remember, you can get creative with garden art and whimsy, too. But that's another article.

Bring on the edible flowers list

Edible flowers are a natural addition to gardens and kitchens. When it comes to edible landscaping, there are no hard-and-fast rules to follow, except to experiment with the amazing number of ways to combine food-producing and ornamental plants. The following plant combinations work well in full-sized gardens, raised beds, as well as containers and window boxes:

- Curly parsley and yellow pansies (Violas)
- Red leaf lettuce with yellow and orange calendulas
- Red chard and New Zealand spinach
- Dwarf curly kale with dusty miller, pink nemesia, and dianthus
- Curly parsley with trailing blue lobelia
- Oregano with red chard and trailing white lobelia
- Curly parsley and strawberries

And for plants with their incredible edible flowers:

- Sugar snap peas (white or pink-purple flowers, depending on the variety)
- Fava beans (white and burgundy)
- Pole beans
- Chives (lavender)
- Dill (yellow-green)
- Nasturtium (orange, red, yellow)
- Sage or salvia (colors vary, but mostly purple, blue and lavender)

Some plants deserve a second look. Various kinds of cabbage, kale, leeks, onion, and sage for example, come in shades of gray and blue. Beets, chard, red cabbage, and purple mustard greens feature colorful shades. Carrots, endive, lemon balm, thyme and nasturtiums sport variegated or mottled shades of white, yellow and light green foliage. Yarrow, dill and fennel have lovely green fernlike leaves that invite touching.

On the smelly side, the most fragrant edibles include chamomile, chives, fennel (brush your hand against it), mint, oregano, parsley, sage, and thyme. Basil, peppers and tomatoes are also quite sniffy.

Go on, hedge a little

Fences and hedges are naturals for edible landscaping. You can also make use of existing structures by training gooseberries, raspberries or currants along a fence. Espalier a dwarf apple or gooseberry along a wall. Try using the plants' structure to support climbing plants like hardy kiwis, trailing nasturtiums, fava beans, or sugar snap peas.

If you don't have a fence, plant a fruiting--and living--hedge. Shrub roses, such as the popular "rugosa," make a lovely and resistant barrier. Rugosas produce large red rose hips that contain 60 times the vitamin C of an orange. The hips can be used to make tea, jam, syrup or jelly.

Blueberries, highbush cranberries, gooseberries and raspberries also remain fairly compact as they grow. And they are easy to establish in the garden. Remember to keep in mind individual plant needs and growing habits. For example, blueberries and cranberries prefer an acidic soil (low pH); gooseberries a neutral one. And raspberries, while yummy, tend to invade adjoining spaces.

Edible landscaping not only adds an interesting twist to gardening, but it enhances your health and well-being at the same time. It's said that the healthiest food is found closest to the source. A cup of fresh-picked raspberries is ten times more flavorful and

better for you than raspberries that traveled a thousand miles by truck to get to your kitchen.

So the next time you're thinking about improving your garden or yard, consider making it do double duty for you and your family by landscaping with incredible edible plants.

Recommended books (available at Burnaby Public Libraries):

The Edible Heirloom Garden by Rosalind Creasy (Metrotown Library, call #: 635 Cre)

Rosalind Creasy's Recipes from the Garden by Rosalind Creasy (Metrotown Library, call #: 641.65 Cre)

The Ann Lovejoy Handbook of Northwest Gardening : Natural, Sustainable, Organic by Ann Lovejoy (McGill Library, Call #: 635.0484 Lov)

Ann Lovejoy's Organic Garden Design School : a Guide to Creating Your Own Beautiful, Easy-care Garden by Ann Lovejoy (Metrotown Library, call #: 635.0484 Lov)

Kitchen Gardens : How to Create a Beautiful and Functional Culinary Garden by Cathy Wilkinson Barash (Cameron Library, call #: 635 Bar)



Next Meeting: Wednesday January 6.

Garden Photography by Adam Gibbs, GardensWest magazine photographer. For bio & more information go to www.adamgibbs.ca

Don't forget to bring your own mug to avoid wasting styrofoam cups!
The meeting starts at 7 pm, Burnaby Village Museum, Main Building, on 2nd floor. Refreshment is served. All are welcome. Annual membership cost \$12. Members share various gardening interests and enjoy 10% discount of regularly priced items at GardenWorks by presenting their membership cards.

Future Speakers:

February 3, 2010 Ray Beckhurst: Hellebores

Proprietor of Jenray Nurseries. Hybridizer of Hellebores and other plant material.

March 3, 2010 Brad Jalbert: Power point presentation on Roses and a hands on pruning Demonstration

Owner and Hybridizer of Select Roses. For information on Select Roses go to www.selectroses.ca

April 7, 2010 Pam Erikson: Daylilies-New Introductions

Owner and Hybridizer of Erikson Daylillies. For information on Erikson Daylillies go to www.plantlovers.com/erikson

May 5, 2010 Bob Tuckey: Growing Vegetables in ground and containers

Proprietor of the Natural Gardener. For information on Bob Tuckey and The Natural Gardener go to www.thenatural-gardener.com

June 2, 2010 Judy Newton: The Summer Garden

Former special education assistant with U.B.C Botanical Garden.

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Speakers

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Website

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298-6350

Out and About

January 16 and 30, Saturdays, 10 am - 2 pm at WISE Hall, 1882 Adanac Street at Victoria Drive. Shop local in the Winter & Spring at our bi-weekly Winter Market . Alternate Saturdays. Next dates: February 13, 27, March 13, 27, April 10, 24

January 17 and 31 Winter Farmers Markets at Port Moody Recreation Complex, 300 loco Rd., Port Moody. Fresh produce, bread meats, and fish. Crafts and homemade jams, jellies and pies. Meet our very own Janice Bobic in the market! Next dates: February 14 and 28, March 14 and 28, April 11 and 25.

Gardening Series Courses at UBC Botanical Garden (advance registration required)

- **Pruning by** Roy Jonsson, Saturday February 6, 2010, 9:30 am - 12 pm, \$33 for garden members, \$40 for non-members
- **Spring Garden Tips by** Roy Jonsson, Saturday, March 6, 2010, 10 am - 12 pm, \$33 for garden members, \$40 for non-members
- **Organic Gardening by** Linda Gilkeson, Saturday, May 1, 2010, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm, \$50 for garden members, \$55 for non-members
- **Espalier by** Tony Maniezzo, Friday, June 11, 2010, 1 pm - 3 pm, \$33 for garden members and \$40 for non-members

Gardening Series noon lectures at UBC Botanical Garden, \$5 each, 12 pm - 1 pm

- **Basics of Plant Propagation by** Ingrid Hoff, Monday, February 8, 2010
- **Cherry Blossoms of Vancouver by** Douglas Justice, Monday, March 22, 2010

There are three easy methods to register UBC courses/lectures:

- call (604) 822-3928 (please have your credit card on hand)
- email the botg@interchange.ubc.ca with the course you are interested in and your phone number, and we will contact you for the credit card information
- in person at the UBC Botanical Garden Office, 6804 SW Marine Drive, between 8:30 AM and 4:00 PM weekdays

VanDusen Cedar Series Lectures - Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden, 5251 Oak St, Vancouver.

Admission fee \$15 for VBG non-members. Contact VBG for further information.

- **"Beatty Biodiversity Museum"** Kim Woolcock gives an intro to the new Museum at UBC opening in late spring to showcase BC biodiversity. Thursday, Jan. 14
- **"What's New, What's Hot & What's Not!"** Brian Minter of Minter Gardens entertains & enlightens on the new plant introductions for 2010. Thursday, Feb 11.
- **"Chasing Wild Orchids & Other Botanical Adventures in Western Australia"** Photographer Ron Long's fascinating journey through western Australia examines the relationship between the flora and the their habitats. Thursday Mar 11.



Many thanks to members attending the annual Christmas potluck. The finger foods and the drinks (a.k.a wines) were delicious. This annual event is a wonderful opportunity for members to get to know one another's gardening passion.



Happy New Year!

May you always have walls for the winds,
a roof for the rain, tea beside the fire,
laughter to cheer you, those you love near you, and all your heart
might desire – Irish Blessing