

Edible Landscaping

Overview

When people think about growing food in urban areas, the first idea is usually to hide the vegetable garden somewhere in the backyard.

Edible landscaping offers an alternative to conventional residential landscapes; edible plants can be just as attractive while producing fruits and vegetables. One can install an entirely edible landscape or incorporate some edible plants into existing gardens.

Definition

Edible landscaping is the use of food-producing plants in the residential landscape. It combines fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, vegetables, herbs, edible flowers, along with ornamental plants into aesthetically pleasing designs. These designs can adopt any garden style and may include anywhere from 1 to 100 percent edible specimens.

Why Landscape with Edibles?

- Enjoy the freshness and flavor of home-grown, fully ripened fruits and vegetables.
- Control the quantity and kind of pesticides and herbicides used on the foods you consume.
- Increase the food security of your household.
- Save on grocery bills.
- Grow unusual varieties not available in stores.
- Get outside, interact with the natural world, and have fun.

Things to Consider

• Location

Most fruits and vegetables require 6 to 8 hours of sun to produce well. Some of the native plants, such as salmonberry and thimbleberry, can take some shade, as can plants that have edible leaves, like lettuce and kale.

• Space

Be sure to think about the mature size of the plant. Dwarf or semi-dwarf trees and smaller-sized shrubs

work well in small spaces. Trellises, fences, and arbors make use of vertical space on which to grow edible trees, shrubs, and vines.

• Time and Care

Edibles require care at specific phases of their growth to remain productive. They will require improved soil, careful watering and fertilizing at the right times, and vigilant management of diseases and insects. This is especially true when the plants are young or just planted.

• Use

Know when to harvest, and be prepared to use the abundance from your garden.

• Beauty

Ornamental plants offer a wide range of flower color, foliage shape, texture and leaf color. With a little research, it is possible to find edibles with the characteristics you value. For example:

1. Love the pink blossoms on a dogwood tree? An apple tree has beautiful pink blossoms.
2. Enjoy the shape and deep red color of the leaves on a Japanese maple? Black elderberry has lacy, blackish leaves.
3. Like the bright red fall color of burning bush? Blueberry bushes do the same.
4. Yearn for the big-leaf hostas but don't have enough shade? Rhubarb plants add drama in a sunny location with big leaves.

Short List of Edible Plants (* denotes native)

- *Small Trees* (10 to 20 feet)

Apple: Choose from semi-dwarf, espalier, and columnar forms; all have pretty pink blossoms in spring. Varieties such as Chehalis, Jonafree, Liberty, Prima, and Redfree are resistant to scab.

* Black Elderberry: Lacy, blackish leaves are very attractive; fruit used for jelly, syrup, and wine. Good fire-resistant plant.

Cherry: Red or golden fruits in summer. Compact forms available for small spaces. Tendency toward diseases. Also, birds like cherries, too!

Fig: Big, tropical looking leaves. Disease free.

Pear: Asian and European—White flowers in early spring. Asian pears tend not to have disease problems.

Persimmon: Colorful orange fruits in the fall; no disease problems.

Plum: Ripe fruits may be green, gold, red, or purple. Brooks and Italian varieties of European plums are easy to grow. Brown rot is the most common problem.

* Serviceberry: Clusters of white flowers in early spring; fall color is brilliant yellow to orange. It is adaptable to a wide range of soil types and moisture.

- *Shrubs* (woody, perennials, annuals; 3 to 10 feet)

Blueberry: Beautiful fall color and abundant fruits in summer. Easy to grow and has very few disease problems.

Currant and Gooseberry: Abundance of tart berries used in jams and jellies. Grow easily in medium to heavy soil and in a wide range of soil pH.

*Evergreen huckleberry: Beautiful evergreen shrub with bronze-colored foliage. Likes part to full shade.

Rhubarb: Large, interesting leaves and red stems. The leaves of rhubarb are poisonous; eat only the stocks.

*Salmonberry: Ripe berries are bright orange to deep red. Naturalizes easily but needs to be controlled from spreading and taking over.

Strawberry tree: Large, evergreen shrub with dark green glossy leaves and bright red fruit. Flowers in late fall to winter; best placed in a sheltered location.

Tomato: Attractive, edible fruits in yellow, orange, red, green, purple, and black colors and in a wide range of shapes. Grown as an annual for the summer months, tomatoes need sun and heat to mature. Avoid overhead watering to discourage disease.

- *Vines and other climbers*

Grape (wine or seedless table grapes): Attractive foliage makes good summer shade over an arbor or patio. Need harsh annual pruning for good productivity.

Kiwi (fuzzy and hardy kiwi): Exotic foliage, white flowers in May, and, in fall, fruit colors in green, red, and brown (colors in fall). Most need a very sturdy structure to support vigorous growth. New, smaller, self-fertile varieties are available.

Raspberry: Berries add beautiful color in the summer and fall. Canes grow fast and fill in a

sunny area in spring and summer. Plant it in well-drained soil to avoid root rot.

Marionberry: A blackberry that does not get out of control, developed at OSU. A special technique is used to train berry canes onto wires.

Cucumber: When allowed to climb, the cucumber flowers and fruit make a nice background plant. They get thirsty in hot weather and need plenty of water.

Pole bean: Need full sun and good air circulation to avoid powdery mildew. Use in a children's area to make teepees and tunnels.

- *Ground covers*

Strawberry: White flowers in spring and red fruits in summer; strawberries are short lived and need to be replanted every 3 to 4 years.

Lingonberry: Beautiful and delicate-looking evergreen ground cover. They will produce more fruit in full sun but will grow in part shade.

Lettuce: Leaves range in color from red and green to blue, with a variety of forms. Lettuce may go to seed quickly in hot weather; sow seed every 2 weeks to have a continued supply.

Kale: Lacy leaves in red, purple, green, and blue. Grows best from fall into winter; is a member of the cabbage family and can be attacked by flea beetles and cabbage moth.

Swiss chard: Brightly colored varieties are the queens of edible ornamentals. Be aware that slugs enjoy Swiss chard, too.

Additional Resources

Resources for edible plants in the Northwest

- One Green World, www.onegreenworld.com
- Raintree Nursery, www.raintree.com
- Home Orchard Society, www.homeorchardsociety.org
- *Sunset Western Garden Book*
- Oregon State University Extension Service, 200 Warner-Milne Road, Oregon City; <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog>
- Clackamas County Master Gardeners, www.cmastergardeners.org

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas), 503-821-1150 (Washington), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah).