

## Eat Your Landscape



No matter how humble your home, you do have room to plant edibles amongst your flowers. Edible landscaping is the use of food plants in an ornamental setting, using the same principles of design as for any planting.

Why edible landscaping? First, we have control of what we are eating. Who knows what chemical pesticides have been applied to that potato, cucumber, or grape that arrives from California or South America? Think how much energy is used to

ship a tomato thousands of miles from the other side of the country or world – you are helping the environment by growing locally. Money is scarce, especially in this depressed economy, and growing some of your own food will save you money. Donate excess produce to a local food shelf, church, or synagogue to provide meals for the less fortunate. You can grow unique varieties of food that are not available in our supermarkets. Many vegetables have been hybridized for the convenience of the grower – less taste, fast maturity, and tough skin to survive shipping across country. Why eat cardboard – a tomato picked green and then gassed to ripen – when you can step outside and pick a fresh, delicious, vitamin rich tomato from your back yard? Sure, care of food plants may require a bit more care in planting, cultivating, watering, pruning, disease and pest control, and harvesting, but consider that this is a hobby and not a job. Besides, think of all the exercise and fresh air you will be enjoying. The last reason for edible landscaping – why let the deer and rabbits have all the fun?

Start small. You can do a one to one replacement of a food crop for a flower, shrub, or tree. The colorful rhubarb, ‘Bright Lights’ Swiss chard, red leaf lettuce, and ‘Bull’s Blood’ beet look beautiful amongst flowers. There is a large choice of ornamental (and edible) peppers. Dwarf tomatoes can be tucked in amongst the flowers. Curly parsley, red or purple basil, parsleys, and chives can form a border. You can replace a shrub border with raspberries, currants, gooseberries, or blueberries. Remember to acidify the soil with peat moss and soil sulfur if you grow blueberries. Amelanchiers are beautiful small trees and shrubs, do not require acid soil, and provide a tasty fruit much like blueberries. Use strawberries as a groundcover along the sides of your shrubs. Cherry trees, plums, edible crabapples, apples, and pears can replace non-productive trees; their flowers and fruit are as beautiful as any strictly ornamental trees. Nut trees can provide shade and food. Eat flowers such as nasturtiums, violets, daylilies, and borage; research first, as some flowers are poisonous, and do not spray them with pesticides.

Don’t hide the edibles in the back yard. They are attractive enough to put out front where the neighborhood can enjoy the sight. Small items such as dwarf tomatoes, beets, herbs, dwarf citrus, low bush blueberries, and strawberries can be grown in containers on the patio and moved indoors when cold weather approaches. Grapes, hops (make wonderful home-made beer), hardy kiwi, or scarlet runner beans are edible and beautiful, and can cover an arbor.

More information can be found in *The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping* by Rosalind Creasy; *Designing and Maintaining Your Edible Landscape Naturally* by Robert Kourik; and *Edible Landscaping*, University of Ohio (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1255.html>).

Happy gardening, Joe Baltrukonis