



Extension FactSheet

Horticulture and Crop Science, 2001 Fyffe Court, Columbus, OH 43210-1096

Edible Landscaping

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Edible landscaping offers an alternative to conventional residential landscapes that are designed solely for ornamental purposes. Edible landscapes can be just as attractive, yet produce fruits and vegetables for home use. One can install an entirely edible landscape, or incorporate simple elements into existing yards and gardens.

What is edible landscaping?

Edible landscaping is the use of food-producing plants in the constructed landscape, principally the residential landscape. Edible landscapes combine fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, vegetables, herbs, edible flowers and ornamental plants into aesthetically pleasing designs. These designs can incorporate any garden style and can include anywhere from 1-100% edible species (Figure 1).

Why landscape with edibles?

There are many reasons to incorporate edible plants into the residential landscape. These include:

- To enjoy the freshness and flavor of home-grown, fully ripened fruits and vegetables
- To control the quantity and kind of pesticides and herbicides used on the foods you consume
- To increase the food security of your household
- To save on grocery bills
- To grow unusual varieties not available in stores
- To get outside, interact with the natural world, and have fun

History of edible landscaping

Edible landscaping is as old as gardening itself and has undergone a recent revival. Ancient Persian gardens combined both edible and ornamental plants. Medieval monastic gardens included fruits, vegetables, flowers, and medicinal herbs. Plans for 19th century English suburban yards, which modeled themselves after country estates, often included edible fruits and berries. The edible components of residential land-

scapes were largely lost in this country to the now familiar shade trees, lawns, and foundation plantings. In the past two decades, however, there has been a revival of interest in edible landscaping, thanks to the work of early pioneers such as Rosalind Creasy.

How to landscape with edibles

Like all plants used in the landscape, edible plants grow best in certain conditions. Many (but not all!) fruits and vegetables do best where they receive at least 6 hours of full sunlight a day. Most also like well-drained soil. Parts of your yard that satisfy these conditions are good places to start an edible landscape. To perform a complete makeover on these areas, consult the books recommended below for a full design process. To start simply, consider a one-for-one substitution. Where you might have planted a shade tree, plant a fruit tree. Where you need a deciduous shrub, plant a currant or hazelnut. Where you have always had chrysanthemums, plant bachelor's buttons—you can eat them. Edible plants come in



Figure 1

Illustration by Clare McCanna from Hagy, Fred. 2001. *Landscaping with fruits and vegetables*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, p. 53.

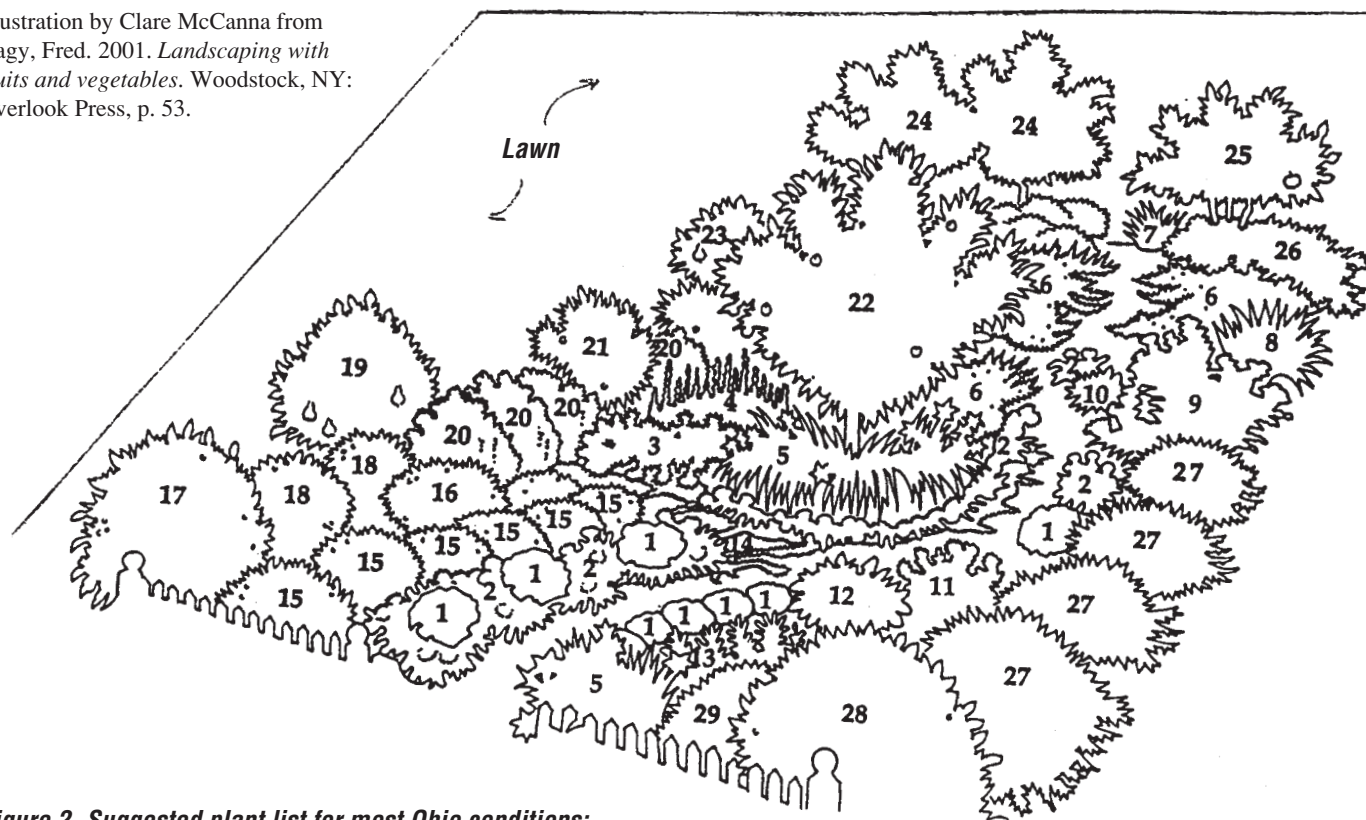


Figure 2. Suggested plant list for most Ohio conditions:

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|--|------------------------------|
| 1. Ornamental cabbage in fall; violas in spring | 15. Blueberries |
| 2. Edging of pot marigolds | 16. Cherry tomatoes |
| 3. Sweet woodruff (shade tolerant) | 17. Honeyberry |
| 4. Marjoram | 18. Red currant |
| 5. Daylilies | 19. Dwarf crabapple |
| 6. Lingonberries (evergreen and shade tolerant) | 20. Black currant |
| 7. Iris or garlic | 21. Cherry plum |
| 8. Iris or chives | 22. Dwarf apple |
| 9. Dill | 23. Dwarf pear |
| 10. Ornamental hot pepper | 24. American plum |
| 11. Butterfly weed | 25. Chokecherry |
| 12. Bell peppers | 26. Red raspberries |
| 13. Variegated leaf sage | 27. Oregon grape-holly |
| 14. Stepping stones with creeping or lemon thyme | 28. Gooseberry or Elderberry |

nearly all shapes and sizes and can perform the same landscape functions as ornamental plants. Figure 2 shows how a small area, about 25 by 25 feet, can be planted almost entirely with edibles that have ornamental value and appear to be a decorative garden. The list can be changed to suit individual taste or local garden conditions.

Here are some more ideas for edible landscapes:

- Put pots of herbs on the patio
- Include cherry tomatoes in a window box or hanging basket
- Build a grape arbor
- Grow nasturtium, violas, borage, or calendula and include flowers in salads
- Eat your daylilies
- Plant a fruit tree in the corner of your yard
- Grow Red-jewel Cabbage
- Plant colorful pepper varieties (e.g., Lipstick, Habanero) alongside flowers
- Tuck lettuce, radishes, or other short-lived greens into a flower bed
- Replace a barberry hedge with gooseberries
- Put basil together with coleus in a planter
- Try yellow or “rainbow” chard
- Grow chives around the mailbox
- Train raspberries up your fence

Won't it take a lot of work?

Many common ornamental plants can survive with minimal care. Most edible plants, however, require a certain amount of attention to produce well. They may require a little extra watering, pruning, fertilizing, or pest management. The time required, however, need not be exorbitant. To care for a fruit tree, for instance, may take only a few hours a year, while the yield could be enormous. It is best to treat edible landscaping as a hobby and not a chore. You may find yourself checking on your plants more than they strictly require, just because you want to see how they're doing. If you are concerned about being overwhelmed, just start small.

Conclusion

The possibilities for edible landscaping are endless. By incorporating just one—or many—edible plants into a home landscape, you can develop a new relationship with your yard and the food you eat.

Further Reading

Creasy, Rosalind. 1982. *The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books. The text

that started the edible landscaping revival. If you feel you need convincing, read this book.

Creasy, Rosalind. 2000. *The Edible Garden Series*. Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing. With separate volumes on salad gardens, Italian gardens, heirloom gardens, and more, this series offers a wealth of ideas.

Gao, Gary and Brad Bergefurd. 2002. "Growing, Harvesting, and Using Culinary Herbs in the Home Garden." HYG-1612-99. <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1612.html>.

Hagy, Fred. *Landscaping with Fruits and Vegetables*. 2001. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press. An excellent book detailing how to design an edible landscape for a typical suburban yard.

Hemenway, Toby. 2001. *Gaia's Garden: A Guide To Home-Scale Permaculture*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co. A guide to ecological design for the home landscape, including the use of multi-functional edible plants.

Kourik, Robert. 1986. *Designing and Maintaining Your Edible Landscape Naturally*. Santa Rosa, CA: Metamorphic Press. Fact-filled design book and reference. Includes recipes. Out of print, but worth a search.

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