

# Edible Landscaping

## Overview

When people think about growing food in urban areas, the first idea is generally 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, and other ornamental plants into aesthetically pleasing designs. These designs can adopt any garden style and may include anywhere from 1-100% 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 6-8 hours of sun to produce well. Some of the native plants such as Salmonberry and Thimbleberry can take some shade, as well as 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-size shrubs

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

- Time and Care

Edibles require care at specific phases of their growth to remain productive. They will require better 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 in flower colors, foliage shape, texture and 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? 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 a Burning bush? Blueberry bushes do the same.
4. Yearn for the big leaf Hostas but don't have enough shade? Rhubarb plants add drama with big leaves in the sun.

## Short list of edible plants (\* denotes native)

- Small Trees (10-20 feet)

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

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

Cherry: Red or golden fruits in summer. Compact forms available for small space. Suffer from bacterial canker. 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, 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 wide range of soil type and moisture.

- Shrubs(woody, perennials, annuals) (3-10 feet)

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

Current and Gooseberry: Abundance of tart berries used in jams and jellies. Grow easily in medium to heavy soil and 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: Evergreen large 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, black colors and 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 fruits in green, red, brown colors in fall. Most need 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. Special technique is used to train berry canes onto wire.

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: Needs 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 3-4 years.

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

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

Kale: Lacy leaves in red, purple, green, blue. Grows best fall into winter. A member of the cabbage family that can be attacked by flea beetle 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](http://www.onegreenworld.com)
- Raintree Nursery, [www.raintree.com](http://www.raintree.com)
- Home Orchard Society, [www.homeorchardsociety.org](http://www.homeorchardsociety.org)
- Sunset Western Garden Book
- Oregon State University Extension Service, 200 Warner-Milne Road, Oregon City;

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/ec>

- Clackamas County Master Gardeners, [www.clackamascountymastergardeners.org](http://www.clackamascountymastergardeners.org)

### **Master Gardener™ advice**

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas Co), 503-725-2300 (Washington Co), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County)