

EDIBLE LANDSCAPING

FOOD FOR THOUGHT





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INTRODUCTION

One rarely considers kale, beans, and cabbages as beautiful but there are many varieties of fruit bearing and edible plants that can add charm, beauty, and purpose to any landscape. By looking at the importance of edible plants, types of edible plants, and maintenance we can see the value of edible landscaping, which most people do not see; this is important because future horticulturalists need to know that landscaping can be useful and beautiful instead of just ornamental.

Edible landscaping or sometimes called foodscaping, is the horticultural practice of adding plants with edible parts such as flowers, stems, leaves, and roots into a design that is not only aesthetically pleasing but has a reward of a tasty and nutritious harvest. (Marquesen 2021 para.2) There are many edibles that can add a variety of color, texture and fragrance to the landscape.

The practice of edible landscaping is not new. In fact, one of the earliest known texts about garden design called the *De Vegetabilibus* was written in the 13th Century by the German friar Albertus Manus. He gave instructions on how to design an herb garden and suggested having the lawn at the center of the garden and surrounding it with borders of sweet-smelling herbs like basil and sage. (Gabriele 2022 para.2-3)

There is more to edible landscaping than planting and enjoying fresh produce. Practicing this type of horticulture can lead to endless possibilities when considering its benefits. Edible landscapes planted in communities, parks, nursing homes, and schools provide access to fresh produce. The way an edible landscape is maintained is healthier for the land and the environment and any yard waste can be easily repurposed and used to add nutrients to the soil. Horticulturists have an opportunity to normalize this type of landscape by learning more about it and teaching others to join them in the process.



IMPORTANCE OF EDIBLE LANDSCAPING



An edible landscape has many benefits including practicality, quality of life, and health benefits.





PRACTICAL

Edible landscaping provides many practical benefits. It is good for the environment, provides a convenient food source, and has a useful purpose other than just decor.



ENVIRONMENT

What is the impact of our current food production system on the environment? According to an online article called, Why Edible Landscaping is the Modern Day Food Revolution, (Meza 2018 para.3) we find that in the United States, 10 percent of the nation's energy budget is used to transport food. Food is transported from farms to our tables and everywhere in between, says Meza. She also states that 69 percent of the world's freshwater supply is used for agriculture.

EASY ACCESS

An edible landscape would provide easy access to food with choices being conveniently located outside of a local dwelling, school, or in a local community.

EXPENSE

On average, Americans spend around \$503 annually on lawncare and gardening (Mekouar 2023 para.10). An edible landscape provides a return on expenses paid with the promise of being able to enjoy the fruits of the labor.





QUALITY OF LIFE



Edible landscaping offers access to fresh food for low income and rural communities, gives a sense of community, and lower food prices.



LOW INCOME & RURAL COMMUNITIES

Many Americans in low-income communities often suffer from the effects of unsafe, neglected landscapes and insufficient access to fresh foods says a peer reviewed journal called, Examining the Business Case and Models for Sustainable Multifunctional Edible Landscaping Enterprises in the Phoenix Metro Area written by Robinson et al. in 2017 p. 25. They describe how implementing an edible landscape in these communities can help improve their quality of life and overcome these obstacles.

COMMUNITY

These types of projects give a sense of community. Edible landscapes can become a community project for neighborhoods, schools, and towns. This type of activity brings people together and they take pride and ownership in the project by being personally invested in their neighborhood and communities (Douglas 2021 para.15).

LOWER FOOD PRICES

Not to mention that every dollar invested in a community garden yields \$6 worth of produce (Mayers 2024 para.1). Horticulturists participating in communities and town edible landscaping projects not only adds beauty to the landscape but helps to improve quality of life for many individuals.





HEALTH

Edible landscapes provide many health benefits including an opportunity to connect with nature, fresh fruits and vegetables for better nutrition, and exercise.



NATURE

According to the National Recreation and Park Association, spending as little as 20 minutes a day outdoors helps reduce stress. An edible landscaping project gives the opportunity to connect with nature.

EXERCISE

Plants need to be inspected and cared for and this is a reason to get outside. Gardening is great exercise and the time spent nurturing the edible plants provides fruits and vegetables that can be added to one's diet.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Access to fresh fruit and vegetables promotes a healthy lifestyle by decreasing fast food consumption (Palar et al. 2019 p.1). Medicinal plants and flowers could also be added to the space to increase the community's health benefits.



EDIBLE PLANTS



Before planting an edible landscape, there are a few things to consider such as sun and shade in the space, drainage, and soil health. It is recommended to get a soil test done first.

There is a tremendous variety of flowers, bushes, fruit trees, herbs and vegetables to choose from when designing an edible landscape.



FLOWERS

	BORAGE (BORAGO OFFICINALIS)	The flavor of these tiny, star-shaped flowers is cucumberlike, good in salads and cold soups, and lovely added to lemonade or seltzer.
	CHIVE (ALLIUM SCHOENOPRASUM)	The lavender blossoms are oniony, but mild. Pull the florets apart and sprinkle them over soups, salads, and egg dishes.
	NASTURTIIUM (TROPAEOLUM MAJUS)	This flower has a peppery tang. The leaves as well as the brilliant orange, red, and yellow flowers add zing to salads and sandwiches.
	PANSY (VIOLA × WITTROCKIANA)	Pansies have a gentle wintergreen flavor. Often candied and used to decorate cakes, the flowers also dress up fruit salads.
	ROSE (ROSA)	The fragrance is the flavor; darker petals have a stronger flavor. Use the petals, first cutting off the bitter white tips. Sprinkle on desserts or float in drinks.

Planting edible flowers can provide culinary, medicinal, and fragrant options to the landscape. Above is a list of five edible flowers that was provided in an article entitled, Good Enough to Eat by Therese Ciesinski written in 2016 in the Vegetarian Times, p.5.



BUSHES & FRUIT TREES






	BUSHES	Blueberry bushes (<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i> is one popular variety) and raspberry bushes (<i>rubus idaeus</i>), are just a few choices to consider as a part of the edible landscape and they come in several popular varieties.
	FRUIT AND NUT TREES - INVESTMENT	In an article by Rhonda Crank written in 2022 called Landscaping for any Yard, she tells us that fruit and nut trees are a long-term investment in the landscape and dwarf varieties are available. They can take about 3 years to start producing fruit. The standard varieties can take five to seven years to produce a crop.
	FRUIT AND NUT TREES - VARIETIES	Crank gives some popular fruit and nut trees to choose from. Pecan (<i>Carya illinoensis</i>), walnut (<i>Juglans regia</i>), peach (<i>Prunus persica</i>), apple (<i>Malus domestica</i>), fig (<i>Ficus carica</i>), satsuma (<i>Citrus unshiu</i>), pomegranate (<i>Punica granatum</i>), and avocado trees (<i>Persea americana</i>) can be options for an edible landscape depending on the climate.
	FRUIT AND NUT TREES - FOOD FOR THOUGHT	Although there are some self-pollenating varieties of fruit and nut trees, there are many varieties that require a male and female of another variety to produce fruit.

There are many edible trees and bushes that can replace traditional types of shrubs.





HERBS AND VEGETABLES

	BENEFITS	Growing herbs and vegetables in an edible landscape can add beauty and purpose. Most herbs are not palatable to deer (Marquesen para.6), which is a bonus.
	EDIBLE BORDERS & HEDGES	Sage (<i>Salvia officinalis</i>) can be used as a border as well as rosemary (<i>Rosemarinus officinalis</i>) which can also be shaped into a hedge.
	SCENT AND BEAUTY	Sage, thyme (<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>), basil (<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>), and oregano (<i>Origanum vulgare</i>) add scent and a unique beauty to the landscape (Sweetser 2023 para.14,15).
	HEIGHT AND TEXTURE	Vegetables can be used in many ways when creating an edible landscape. Pole beans (<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>) can add height to the landscape (Marquesen para.5) while different varieties of greens such as kale (<i>Brassica oleracea</i>) and collard greens (<i>Brassica oleracea</i> var. <i>Acephala</i>) add texture. ((Meza 2018 para.11,13)
	BEAUTY & DESIGN	Horticulturists can use the landscape as a canvas and come up with a variety of beautiful colors, designs and textures using herbs and vegetables.

There are many other varieties of herbs and vegetables not listed here. This is a brief glimpse into what an edible landscape can contain.



MAINTENANCE



All landscapes require maintenance, and the edible landscape is no exception. Pest control, routine care, and harvesting are all important parts of keeping the edible landscape healthy and productive.





PEST CONTROL TIPS

Pest control for the edible landscape is different from traditional methods. The plants are edible therefore, harmful pesticides are not suggested.

It is helpful to know good bugs from bad ones.

Organic pest control is ideal. Marigolds, mint, basil, garlic, and rosemary are some examples of natural pest control (TRUEGREEN 2022 para. 1,3,4,10,11). These plants are also edible, which is an added benefit.

Knowing the difference between a bad pest such as an aphid and a good bug like the assassin bug, which eats aphids and caterpillars, is a very important part of proper pest control.

Another thing that is helpful in managing pests is to encourage helpful bugs to stay in the landscape. Using harmful chemicals will discourage and harm them.

Releasing lady bugs and praying mantises is another way to control and eliminate pests.



ROUTINE CARE

WEEDING, PRUNING, AND WATERING IS IMPORTANT FOR THE HEALTH OF THE EDIBLE LANDSCAPE.

1. WEEDING

Depending on the time of year, weeding can be a daily chore.

2. DISPOSAL

It is important to dispose of rotten fruit and vegetables to deter pests.

3. COMPOSTING

The yard waste can be composted and turned into healthy soil for the next year. According to a web article on the United States Environmental Protection Agency's website titled Composting at Home, by composting "You reduce the volume of materials that might otherwise be disposed of in landfills or trash incinerators – leaves, grass clippings, yard trim, and food scraps – and prevent powerful greenhouse gases from being emitted into the atmosphere."

4. PRUNING

Pruning trees and bushes is normally done in the cold season when the plants are dormant.

5. WATERING

Nature will provide water most of the time but keeping an eye on the weather and amount of water the plants are getting is crucial to their survival. Certain types of plants and trees will require more water than others.

6. RESEARCH

Doing adequate research on the plants and trees and knowing what they require is an important job for the horticulturist.



HARVEST

Other than the landscape being beautiful, the harvest is a very important and enjoyable part of growing an edible landscape. The harvest can be used to feed the community, seeds can be saved from unattractive fruit if it is of an heirloom variety, and the sale of the abundance from the edible landscape can be used to grow and maintain it. With proper planning, an edible landscape can produce year-round harvests (Stross 2023 para.1).

Harvesting the edible landscape gives an extra bonus of knowing where the food came from and how fresh it is.





CONCLUSION

We have only briefly touched on the topic of edible landscaping. Future horticulturalists may continue to research more in-depth and learn more.

Several examples were given about the importance of edible landscaping. It is practical, good for the environment by lowering the amount of water and transportation used in our current agricultural system and offers a convenient way to obtain fresh produce and has a purpose other than being ornamental.

By encouraging edible landscaping, quality of life can be improved for low-income families who have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, communities can be strengthened, and growing fresh fruit and vegetables can result in lower food prices.

The opportunities to connect with nature, get exercise while tending the landscape, and added nutrition from eating the fruits and vegetables produced are just some of the health benefits of an edible landscape.

We looked at several varieties of edible flowers, plants and trees that can be put into the landscape that offer beautiful colors, height, texture and fragrance. Flowers can not only be culinary but also medicinal. Bushes and fruit trees can be used as hedges and for shade. Herbs can add a border or hedge, vegetables can be ornamental and colorful and be used for height in the edible landscape.

Future horticulturalists need to know that maintenance is required with an edible landscape although some plants and trees require more maintenance than others. Pest control, weeding, pruning and watering must be done regularly to have a healthy edible landscape.

Harvesting the edible landscape is a rewarding activity. The harvest can be used for seed saving, sharing the abundance with the community, or sold and the proceeds invested back into the landscape for the next year.

After looking at the importance of edible landscaping, types of edible plants and vegetables, and the maintenance of an edible landscape it is hopeful that future horticulturists can see the value of edible landscaping and that it can be useful and decorative and is an alternative to the traditional landscaping model. This method offers benefits to the community and there is an opportunity to help the environment. This information is food for thought for the future horticulturists who could not only change their local landscape by considering edible landscaping as something of importance adopting it as a practice, but they could be a part of something greater and bigger that could change the world.



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