

The Edible Estate

With the price of food rising, it may not be surprising to you that edible landscaping has become a mainstream topic. In actuality, many of the proponents of edible landscaping have been touting the benefits of this form of landscaping for several decades. They point to the fact that when the primary career was farming, edible plants always were cultivated in close proximity to the home. By ringing their homes with edible plants, settlers were able to easily access their outdoor pantry and gather up the components for a meal quickly and conveniently.



Today, how-to books on edible landscaping abound. In fact, architect and artist Fritz Haeg planted what he labeled the first "Edible Estate" in Kansas in 2005. Since then, he's also created other prototype gardens in New Jersey, Maryland, Texas and London, England. With several other contributors, Haeg has produced the book *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*, in which homeowners recount their experiences of ripping up their front lawns in favor of fruits, vegetables and herbs. In addition to pointing out the benefits of planting

edible landscaping -- including aesthetics and the ability to grow your own food -- Haeg also brings up issues such as concern for the environment, global food production and generating a sense of community in urban and suburban neighborhoods.

Even if you live in a condo or townhome, you can still grow a wide variety of fruits, vegetable and herbs in container pots. Many people have turned their balconies and patios into mini gardens.



If you own a house, you may not be ready to create an "Edible Estate", but you can find ways to include some succulent herbs, plants and trees in your estate plan. Experts agree one of the best ways to begin is by taking a walk. A nature walk throughout your yard can be a useful exercise to envision various possibilities on all sides of your yard.

Keeping your house in view at all times, you can let the expanse of your property dictate spots for an herb garden or bed for edible flowers.

With some ideas in mind, you can cordon off the various elements you imagine using stakes and strings. If you're building some curves into the landscaping, a garden hose can be used to outline an area. Once you're satisfied with your vision, it's a good idea to live with your temporary three-dimensional design for a few days. And when you know you've got it right, you can commit your plan to graph paper, complete with yard measurements. Include the walls of your home on your graph, locating windows and doors on the sketch, to give you an idea what parts of your garden can be viewed from inside your home.



If you start with an herb garden, it's good to know that all culinary herbs have edible flowers. Onions, chives and garlic are popular additions to outdoor beds. Harvest your herbs as you would normally, but leave a few plants alone to form flowers and add them to salads or other dishes. Other flowering herbs include oregano, sage, thyme, savory, marjoram, and all varieties of basil. And these herbs and their flowers don't need to be dried before using them. In fact, they are better when used fresh from the garden.

How about a nice garden salad with raisins, pecans and chrysanthemums? Both the "garden" variety and Asian chrysanthemums are edible, and the Asian flowers can be used in stir fry dishes or herb teas.

And what about livening up your table with a bouquet of fuchsias along with a garnish of fuchsias on top of fish, chicken or grilled vegetables? Fuchsias are beautiful to look at and an exciting addition to the dinner plate.

Some common sense advice: Always treat your edible flowers and herbs the way you'd treat other edibles -- make sure the soil is not contaminated, and the plants are not treated with pesticides or other harmful chemicals.

And of course, avoid eating any flower or other plant unless you've identified it and are sure it's edible. You can check many edible plant varieties on the garden.org website of the National Gardening Association.

