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The Edible Landscape

Enhance your garden with plants that stimulate all the senses.

BY ALEIGH ACERNI

Imagine a landscape that's beautiful, fragrant, soft, buzzes with activity, and best of all, puts food on your table. You can combine pretty, edible plants with ornamentals to create a decorative, palate-pleasing landscape.

The benefits of edible landscaping are undeniable, says Robert Kourik, author of "Designing and Maintaining Your Edible Landscape Naturally." Produce from edible landscapes can be picked at the peak of flavor and ripeness.

"You can grow things that no one else has for sale," adds Kourik. "So you can get some of the heirloom varieties not available on the market that have unique and distinctive flavors."

Herbs are an especially good place to start for an edible garden. They're great for cooking and much cheaper to grow than buy. In most cases, a single herb plant is plenty, but there are exceptions: Basil, garlic, onions, dill and scallions tend to be used in larger quantities, so grow a couple of plants.

You won't have to give up your favorite ornamentals to have a true edible landscape. In fact, it's not recommended. Kourik suggests sticking to a 50-50 ratio of edibles to

Prune it

One of Robert Kourik's essential tools for harvesting and maintaining his edible landscape is an ergonomic Felco 7 pruner. It features a rotating handle that reduces the tendency for blisters and hand fatigue. "I've worn that pruner down," he says. It's expensive, but worth it. "If you prune too much you can get sore fast," he adds. These pruners help prevent that. **PRICE: $58.49 INFO: www.felcostore.com (available online only)**

ornamentals. Start out even smaller if you're not sure you'll be able to harvest and eat what you grow.

It's also a good idea to mix edibles with ornamentals so as your edibles mature and are harvested, your landscape remains attractive. "Some plants you have to hide because they look really tacky when they're near the end of their season," Kourik says.

When you harvest and ornamental like kale, you're eating up part of your design! "Either you live with that or you have a transplant plan for when it's gone," Kourik says. "You have to ebb and flow with the seasons. It's nice to have other perennials to outline the area—something that holds the structure together throughout the year."

Kourik recommends planting beds with a mix of herbaceous borders. They are naturally drought-resistant and lure insects with their flowers and pollen to help control aphids, tomato hornworms, mealybugs and various caterpillars. As an added bonus, the plants are also great for herbal teas, cut flowers and edible flowers. White clover, yarrow and fennel are favorites. "That can be done only by a gardener because you don't have to buy all of those herbs in a store," Kourik says.

One of Kourik's favorite uses for bunches of herbs is to spread a generous layer of fresh lavender or thyme on a griddle, top them with chicken breasts and then another layer of herbs. Put a cookie sheet and a couple of bricks for weight on top of the chicken and herbs, turning the chicken over once during cooking to make sure it's cooked evenly. ●

Get it here

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www.groworganic.com; 888-784-1722

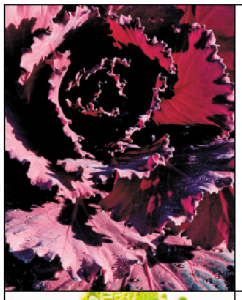
Goodwin Creek Gardens
goodwincreekgardens.com; 1-800-846-7359

Raintree Nursery
raintreenursery.com; 360-496-6400

Park Seed Company
www.parkseed.com; 1-800-213-0076

GREAT FOR HOME COOKING: Make a delicious meal from your edible landscape! See page 53 for recipes using plants from this page.

Grow it, eat it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ORNAMENTAL KALE. Able to grow in all zones, this plant gives a dramatic display of fall and winter color, and it tastes just as good as garden kale. Kourik recommends transplanting it among the fading color of late-summer bedding plants in showcase settings—near the front door or along a walkway.

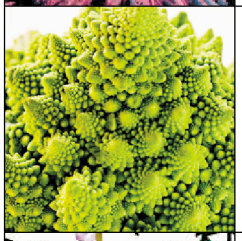
PHOTO: FOOD COLLECTION

ROMANESCO. Also able to grow in all zones, romanesco is a broccoli-like plant that looks great paired with ornamental kale for a winter ornamental vegetable border. Full-grown heads are harvested at a rich, yellow-green color.

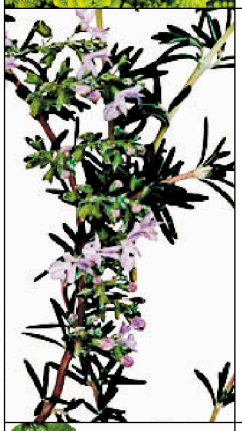
PHOTO: CREATAS

ROSEMARY. Another all-zone grower, rosemary offers a range of flowers from royal and pale blue to pink and white. One of the most useful plants for an edible landscape, it makes a great backdrop for silver foliage plants and for plants with bright flowers. Rosemary can also be used as an easily shaped, petite hedge, as an accent plant for winter and early spring color, and as a foundation planting to accent the vertical lines of a building or arbor.

PHOTO: FOOD COLLECTION

CORN SALAD. Otherwise known as mâche, corn salad grows in all zones and can stand the cold winters of many climates, but doesn't like heat. Harvested before it flowers, it offers a rosette of rounded, spinach-like leaves that grow somewhat like a bibb lettuce. It makes a good, edible ground cover and filler plant for a flower border.

PHOTO: JUPITERIMAGES

KIWI. The kiwi plant offers dark green leaves with a distinctive golden-brown, fuzzy underside and large blossoms. It is an excellent deciduous vine with fresh-tasting fruit.

PHOTO: VALUE STOCK

QUINCE. The quince is a pest-free edible that makes a useful background shrub or tree and mixes well with drought-resistant herbs. It grows in zones 5 to 9 and will tolerate completely dry summers, but produces more fruit with regular watering.