

View of Sustainable Gardening: Edible Planting

Written and photographed
by Sean James

Since big leaps can be frightening, baby steps are good. This applies to many things in life and certainly to vegetable gardening. It's easy to start with a baby step, isn't it? And why should you think about starting, you ask? Edible planting is the fastest-growing form of landscaping for homeowners... with good reason.

Many veggies, such as kale and Swiss chard, are incredibly beautiful and add great texture to the garden. Think first about the potential beauty of the plant; texture and foliage colour and even fruit. Whether or not you like Brussels sprouts, they're really surprisingly interesting in the garden and add great contrast to plants such as blue ornamental grasses and purple or yellow coneflowers. Vegetables don't have to be stuck in the corner as if they behaved badly. They can be allowed to play with others quite effectively.

There are lots of great websites out there that can help us learn how to grow vegetables. "Renee's Garden" has a great blog which includes delicious recipes and tips on how to grow plants. Just do a quick search online, using key words like seeds. Tree and Twig is a local company that offers heirloom seeds and also has an amazing and thought-provoking blog. Learn a little bit every time and before you know it you'll be cooking food that you grew with your own hands, and you can be confident that there are no pesticide residues.

Heirloom Varieties

Many people are fans of heirloom varieties, which have been grown for generations without fertilizers and without



▲ Edible plants can add beautiful textures and foliage colours to any garden.

Redbor Kale and Purple Dome Asters make a gorgeous combination. ▼



a lot of work. They usually have superior flavour although they might not be as pretty as some of the newer varieties. The Brandywine tomato is wrinkled and purportedly ugly, but it's often a winner in tomato-tasting challenges.

You can learn a lot at events like Seedy Saturdays that are held in many communities to share and exchange garden seeds, and also at shows like Canada Blooms. Both the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton and the Niagara Parks Botanical Garden have amazing edible gardens. Each of these can give you great ideas. Many communities offer short courses in permaculture, the art of growing your own food sustainably.

It's a good idea to start with a few confidence boosters. Some of the easiest vegetables to grow are different types of

lettuce, as well as beans and tomatoes. Think about using purple-leafed basil or carrots to edge your garden. Just make sure to work up the soil well and add lots of organic matter. Kale takes care of itself and the large, textured purple or blue leaves look amazing with dwarf 'Purple Dome' asters.

Start Small

Try little things every year, such as a pot of herbs or bush zucchini outside the kitchen door, or on an apartment balcony. The best vegetable gardeners out there are not professional landscapers, but regular homeowners who have built, year after year, on the small amount of knowledge with which they began.

Get the family involved. You can enjoy spending time cooking your harvest with the kids or someone special. One of the things we often forget is that gardening should be

enjoyable. Our society is losing track of the fact that at the end of a Saturday afternoon of gardening, you've really accomplished something special and beautiful. You can save some money and increase your property values. There's a whole industry called horticultural therapy because gardening makes us feel good emotionally and veggie gardening satisfies our appetite as well. Try new things. Try new flavours. Share the fun and the food.

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