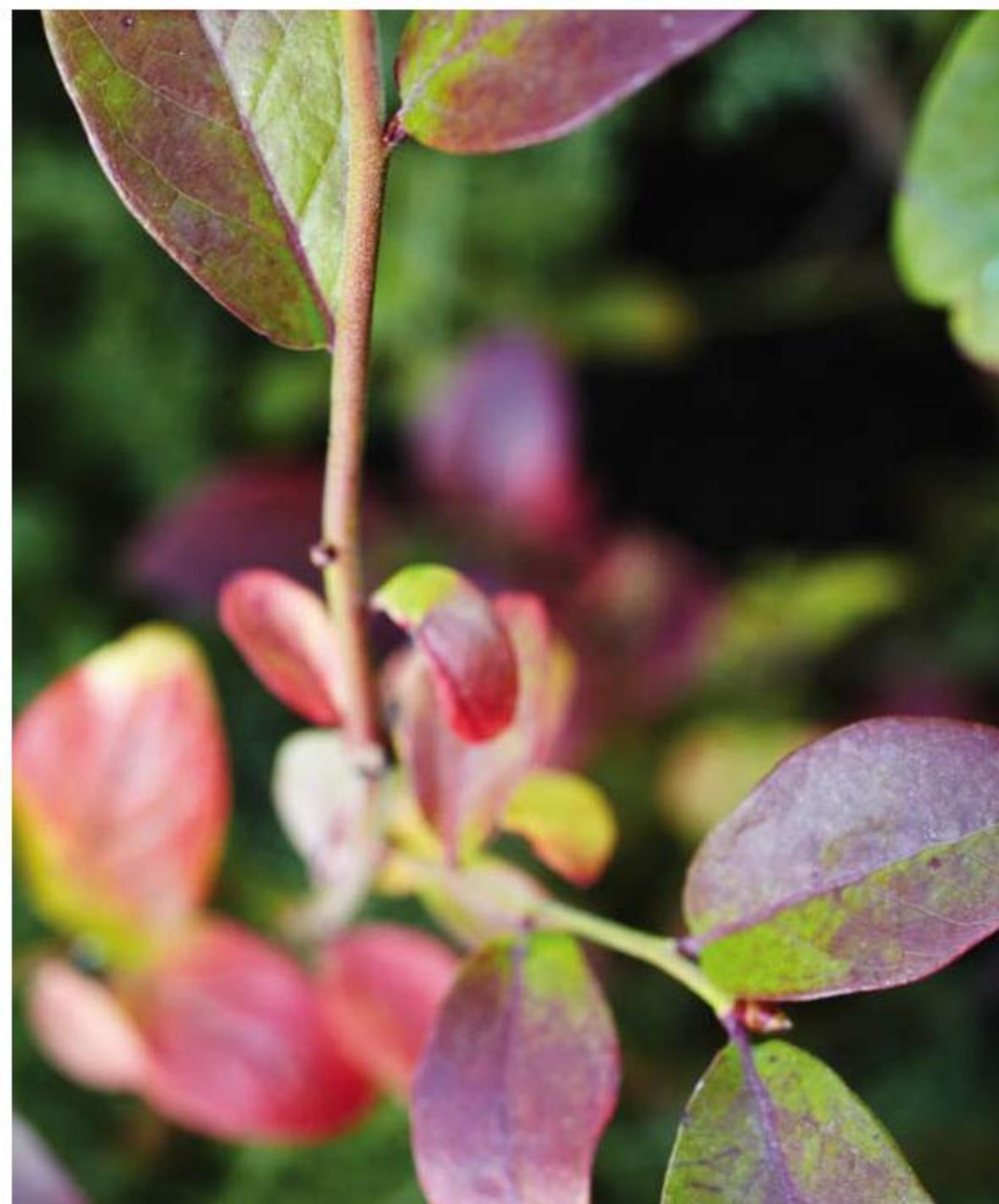
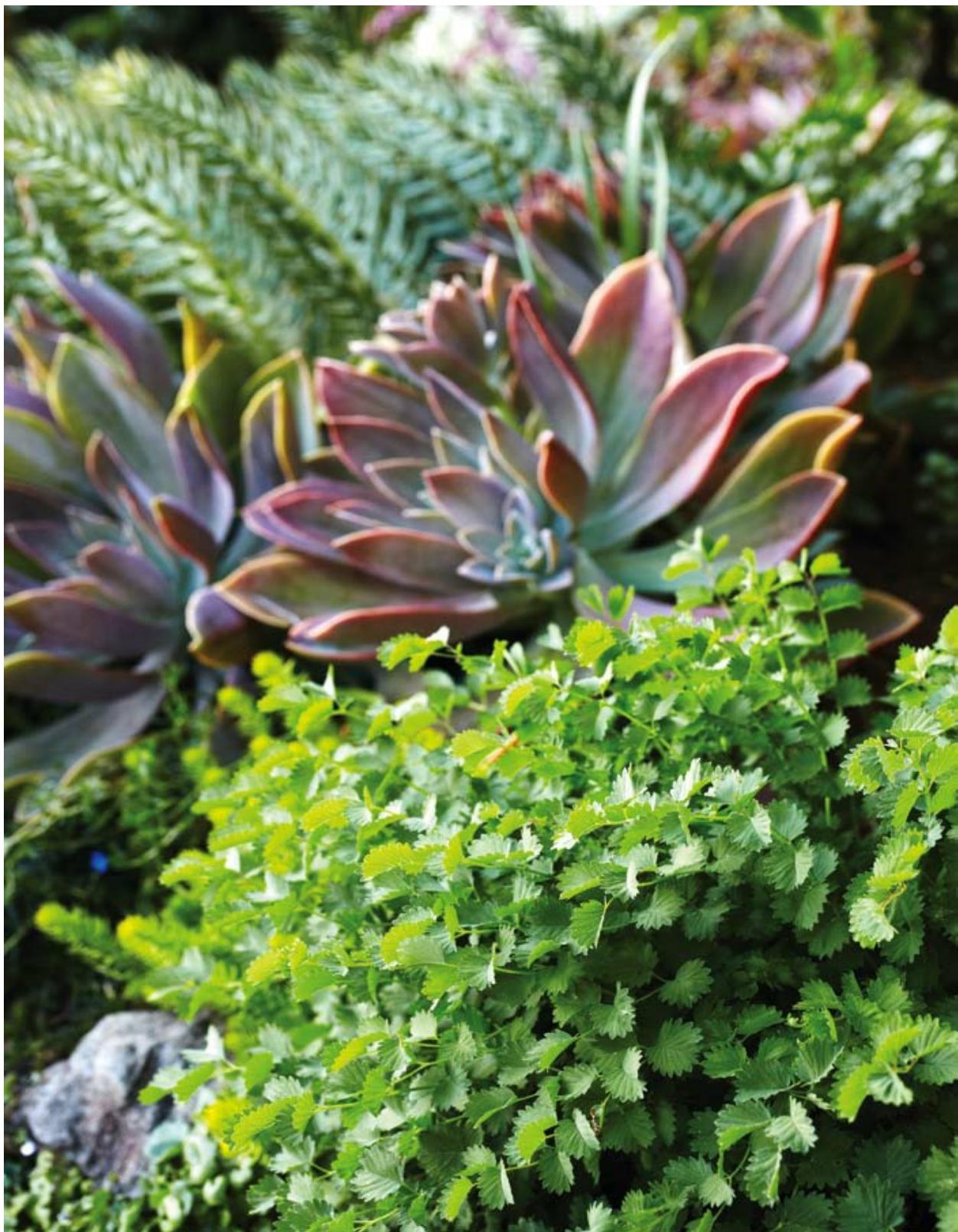


# The BeauTiful ediBle Garden



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ii *The Beautiful Edible Garden*

# **The Beautiful Edible Garden**

## **Design a Stylish Outdoor Space Using Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs**

**leslie BenneTT and sTefani BiTTner** Photography by David Fenton and Jill Rizzo  
Floral Arrangements by Studio Choo  
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## inTroduCTion

Welcome to the beautiful edible garden.

This is a book about edible garden design. It is also a heartfelt invitation to join us in the practice of gardening. For us, gardening is a way to connect with the land, our community, and, perhaps most importantly, ourselves. It is also an opportunity to create and to be inspired. When you pursue food production and beauty together, you form meaningful spaces that have the power to both ground and uplift.

This book features ideas and projects that we have developed as Star Apple Edible + Fine Gardening, our San Francisco Bay Area-based edible landscape design service. Our approach is to redefine the plant palette to utilize edible and ornamental plants throughout your garden in a way that is both beautiful and productive. You can put this information to use in creating a space that includes vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, and other ornamental plants. We outline how to start, providing design principles and step-by-step guidance for a range of spaces, from front yards and backyards to smaller areas like decks, porches, and side yards, and even container gardens and window boxes.

We recommend that you read the first two chapters thoroughly and then refer back to them as needed as you work through your garden design. If you want to start with designing a garden for the backyard or

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a narrow side yard instead of the front yard, it's fine to jump between chapters three, four, and five according to your needs. Use chapter six as a reference in planting and maintaining your edible garden throughout the year.

For further inspiration, we've included photographs and side bars throughout the book from our book partners, Jill Rizzo, Alethea Harampolis, and David Fenton. Photographers David and Jill capture the simple, intangible beauty of the garden and its harvests. At



their floral design business, Studio Choo, Jill and Alethea highlight the beauty of the natural world in unexpected floral designs. Their sidebars include instructions for simple ways to utilize edible and ornamental plants from your garden as creative arrangements in your home.

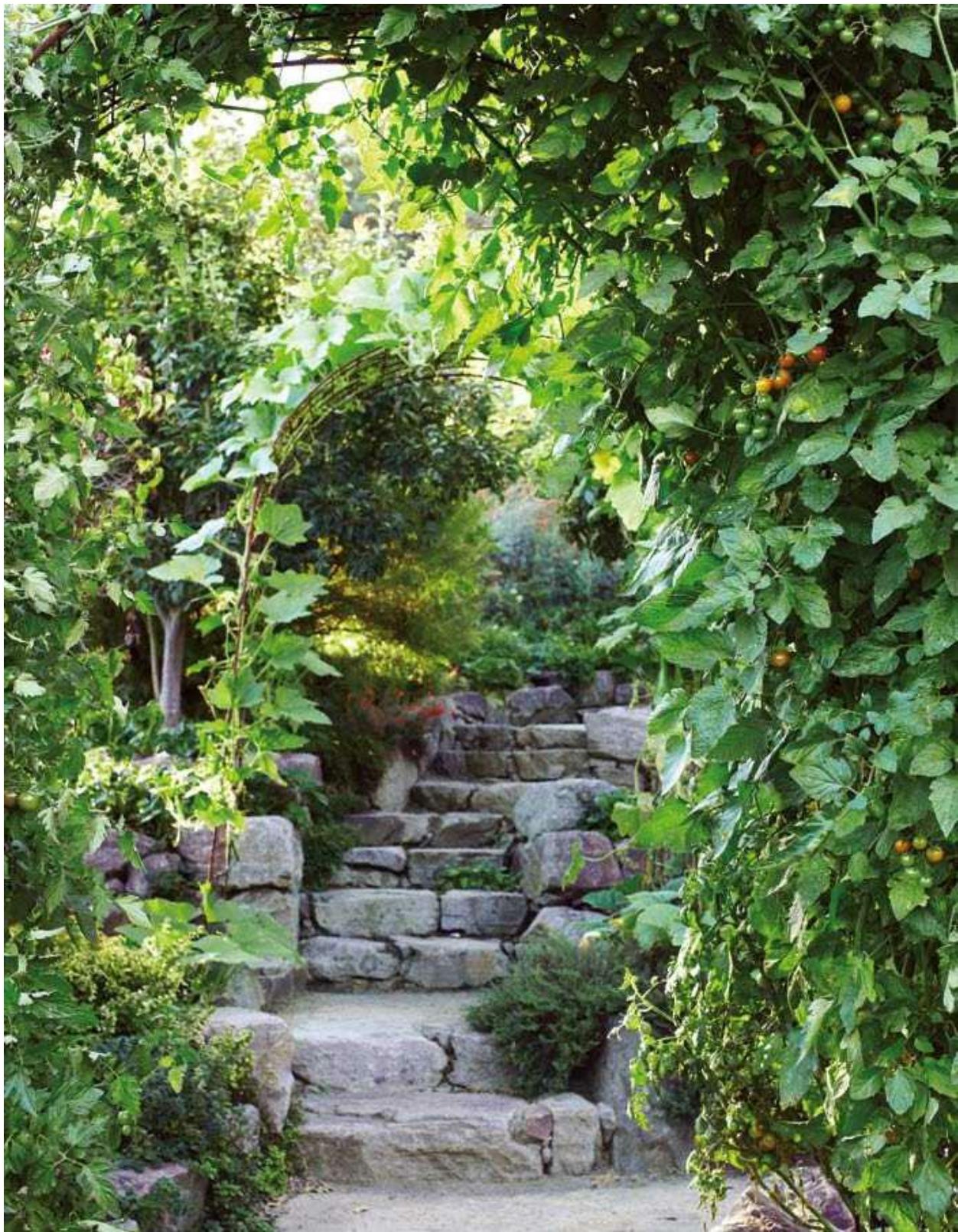
This book is meant to provide general concepts for designing a garden that incorporates edible plants, so we do not include sowing times or specific vegetable- or fruit-planting guidelines because these differ depending upon the climate zone you live in. Instead, we encourage you to use this book along with a vegetable- and fruit-growing guide that covers those specifics. Where we can, we offer multiple plant choices to fit most climate conditions and garden styles so that you can select plants from our suggestions as well as search for other plants on your own.

Once your eyes are open to this new way of thinking about edible plants, you'll start to see the potential for beauty and food production everywhere you look. Most important, have fun and enjoy the transformation

that is about to take place in your garden.

—Stefani and Leslie

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## Principles for Successful Edible Garden Design

You know you want to grow food, but you don't live on a farm and you don't want your front or backyard to look like one. You want to create an edible garden, but you also want it to be beautiful. So where, and how, do you start? In attempting to create a space that reflects good landscape design and supports sustainable food production, it quickly becomes clear that we are straddling two different worlds. In this chapter we will share with you the principles from both small-scale organic farming and landscape design that are necessary to create a beautiful edible garden. Whether you are making changes to your existing garden or making plans for a new one, these ideas provide the fundamentals you need to approach your own garden space.

We've all seen the enthusiastic vegetable gardener whose yard overflows with corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, and zucchini. A garden like this

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is definitely productive; however, these summer vegetable favorites are all annual plants that will live and die within a single season. There will be a short stage in midsummer when the garden is green and full, but these annual vegetables are not enough to keep the garden looking good throughout the year.

In order to have an edible garden that is attractive and productive year-round, you'll need to expand your focus beyond the typical vegetable





garden that most of us are familiar with. By using basic design principles you can create a meaningful, enjoyable space where fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, and ornamental plants thrive together. The four major considerations for creating a beautiful, productive garden are (1) establishing a pleasing, balanced overall look; (2) arranging plants for both utility and aesthetics; (3) using a mix of ornamental and edible plantings for year-round beauty and production; and (4) maintaining a unified design style throughout the garden.

As with all “rules,” of course, the magic is in their interpretation. In later chapters we’ll be giving examples of how these design principles apply to the front yard, backyard, and other smaller spaces. As you read through the book, remember that your goal is to create a space that you love to live with and eat from, so you should approach these ideas as tools to use in developing a garden that really works for you and the way you live.

## Principle #1: Balance

We are all searching for it, aren't we? So it's not surprising that our gardens need balance, too. Balance is the first, and most important, design principle that you should keep in mind when designing your garden. When people say a garden has "a good flow" or "a good feel" about it, they are talking about the garden's balance. Balance is achieved by the grouping and repetition of like elements within a space.

You can give your own garden a balanced look by grouping plants and arranging hardscape materials so that elements of structure, color, texture, and quantity are repeated in a purposeful manner throughout your landscape. An annual-vegetable bed that is incorporated into an overall garden design using these techniques will not look messy or out of place. Instead, there will be a seamless transition between edible and ornamental areas of the garden and a sense that everything belongs exactly where it is.

### Hardscape Materials

An important element to be balanced is your hardscaping materials, such as the natural stone or wood used for patios, decks, paths, and steps, among other elements. Well-designed landscapes complement a home's architecture. When choosing hardscaping materials to use in your yard, look to your home's exterior and repeat a material used in its construction. You can choose another one or two materials to repeat throughout your garden, but try not to use too many different materials; adding more may result in a jumbled, imbalanced look. For example, if you are using metal edging as a border for your planting beds, you could also use metal trellises or arbors within the planting beds. Similarly, natural quarry stone-edged planting beds are wonderful combined with similarly colored decomposed-granite pathways, as both share the same hues and stonelike appearance. If you are building steps in this same garden, repeat the stone again for a cohesive look.



The colors and shapes of the pomegranate trees, 'Hidcote' lavender, textured succulents, bronze-colored grass *Carex testacea*, and groundcover herbs repeated along this path work together to create a sense of balance in this garden.

## Height

Hardscaping and plants can be used together to provide a sense of balance through your garden. If you have an impressive tall tree on one side of your garden, it will look best if you place a second, or even a third, vertical element, such as a tall vegetable trellis or patio arbor, in another area of the garden. If all the tall elements are grouped together on one side of the garden, that part of the garden will feel overloaded and heavy. Instead, distribute the points of vertical interest across the landscape; they help keep the eye moving through the garden and establish a sense of balance. Similarly, a solid wall in one part of your garden might be echoed and balanced by a low hedge of dense, evergreen plant material; this helps distribute visual weight throughout the entire area and avoids a feeling of imbalance.

## Color

Color plays such a big role in the look and feel of a garden that its importance cannot be overlooked. The colors you use should enhance the design and balance of your garden—not throw it into chaos. Choose your colors purposefully; you'll be happier with the results if you choose just three or four colors and stick to them. These colors should be repeated throughout the garden to establish a cohesive look.



LEFT: Lime thyme and verbena add strong purple and emerald-green colors to the landscape.

RIGHT: The burgundy foliage of the ornamental purple smoke bush contrasts beautifully with the variegated leaves of the edible Chilean guava and green leaves of the culinary herb *Nepeta nepetella*. White, green, and burgundy are a good color trio for repeating throughout the garden.

Keep in mind that a plant's color is not limited to its fruit or flower color. The leaf color, also known as foliage, of both ornamental and edible plants can supply color to your garden, too. Actually, more often than not, it is foliage color that makes the bigger visual impact in a garden. The color burgundy, for example, can be found in the foliage of ornamental shrubs, like burgundy loropetalum, Japanese maple, and purple smoke bush, and also in the flowers and fruits of edible plants such as the pomegranate tree, the stems of 'Ruby Red' chard, or the leaf color of 'Bull's Blood' beets. In winter, the bare branches and trunks of the deciduous blueberry and Japanese



Repetition of texture and color make for a visually balanced front yard. This planting includes 'Red Beauty' yarrow, English thyme, 'Martinii' euphorbia, gray-foliaged 'Kellerei' yarrow, 'White Anniversary' variegated oregano, and 'Berggarten' sage.

maple are both tinged with coral and red tones. But don't forget shades of

green, especially plants with white-and-green-variegated or chartreuse-colored leaves, which are great for lightening up a shady planting area.

You can make almost any color combination work well, as long as you stick to a few colors to establish your theme and use other colors selectively. One combination of colors that's versatile in a garden is a base of yellow, purple, and gray, with dashes of red or orange as accent colors. You can use a mix of edibles and ornamental plants such as 'Moonshine' yarrow, lavender, and pineapple guava to establish your main theme. Then use the fruit and flowers of currants, salvia, red sunflowers, and pomegranate for seasonal red accents. Similarly, white, green, burgundy, and silver make for a beautiful base; choose any additional bright color as an accent.

Used in this way, color helps create a balanced and cohesive look among your planting beds. In an integrated edible, ornamental garden that includes many different elements, color is an especially helpful tool for achieving balance across your landscape.

## Texture and Shape

Plant leaves can be big or small, lush or fine, fuzzy or glossy, rounded or spiny. Mixing different leaf sizes, shapes, and textures helps add subtle depth and visual interest to a garden. Repeating texture and shape in ornamental and edible plants is also an excellent way to create balance throughout your landscape. A good example is the long, narrow leaves of phormiums and leeks. The grassy fronds of each plant reference and play off each other, and can establish a similar textural feel in two different parts of a garden.





The varying leaf sizes, shapes, and textures of rhubarb, edible purslane and borage, *Carex testacea* grass, and burgundy-hued loropetalum add depth and visual interest to this garden.

Rhubarb, a perennial, adds great texture to any garden. Its large, rounded leaves (which are poisonous and thus not edible; only the leaf stems are edible) not only contrast wonderfully with narrow, spikier grasses, but they also repeat the rounded edges of the foliage of many fruit trees, such as fig—but at a lower planting height. Dramatic gunnera or other large-leaved subtropical foliage are ornamental plantings that mimic the shape of the rhubarb leaf and bring in a contrasting texture for visual interest and balance.

In linking ornamental and edible parts of your garden, repeat textures from the landscape in your vegetable beds and in the transitional planting beds that surround them. The broad, fuzzy leaves of 'Berggarten' sage, planted among your edibles, can be mimicked elsewhere in your landscape with ornamental, low-growing lamb's ears.

LEFT: Peppermint contrasts with delicate euphorbia and the wide, lily pad-like leaves of variegated nasturtium.

## Quantity

How you group your edible and ornamental plants is an important design decision. As described above, plantings of a certain height, density, color, or texture in one part of the garden should be paralleled or at least referenced by a similar planting in another part of the garden. If you design a garden bed so

that larger numbers of the same plant are grouped with each other, they will have a stronger visual impact than if they are planted separately. This technique is referred to as mass plantings.

Grouped together en masse, smaller, less substantial plants can become a real visual presence in the garden and can help establish balance. For example, as long as the planting is massed enough, the grassy texture



of small garden chives can be balanced against a much larger ornamental grass placed in another part of the garden. While one red lettuce would go unnoticed, a large clump of them is significant enough to provide visual balance against a larger tree or shrub with burgundy foliage, like a red Japanese maple.

Unless you are highlighting a special focal-point plant (see page 54) or are planting vegetables in your annual-vegetable planting bed, you should avoid planting a single plant (often referred to by garden designers as a “onesie”) on its own. Too many single plants placed on their own throughout the

garden leads to a choppy look that feels haphazard and unbalanced.

## Principle #2: Arrangement

How you arrange and set plants out in your planting beds is another key design principle. Taking into consideration symmetry and asymmetry, plant height and harvest frequency, and underplanting (planting one plant beneath another, such as setting out groundcovers beneath a tree) as arrangement techniques will help create an attractive and productive edible garden.

### Symmetry and Asymmetry; Even and Odd Numbers

One of the most effective tricks for creating a strong visual impact is to use symmetry and asymmetry in combination with even and odd numbers of plants. Whether you are planting edibles or ornamentals, the same ideas apply.



LEFT: Planted in straight lines, the braising greens in this urban modern vegetable bed reflect the linear, geometric style of the surrounding hardscape and ornamental plantings. Right: Staggered planting of purple choi.



Stylistically, a symmetrical planting (one that is the mirror image of its parts)

is helpful in achieving a structured, formal effect. Planting in matching pairs or even numbers is often used to create a formal garden. This “matchymatchy” approach can sometimes end up looking simplistic and forced, so use it judiciously. Likewise, plants set out in straight lines are often appropriate for an urban, modern design style, but when edibles are planted this way in other style gardens, they can resemble rows of crops found on farms.

In contrast, an asymmetrical planting is the basis of a more organic, relaxed look. For most garden styles it is usually the best way to achieve a feeling of natural balance. When placing your structural features, such as hardscaping, evergreen plants, and fruit trees, try to use groups of three to create asymmetrical triangles of similar heights and densities. This will create a structural framework that you can then fill in with other plantings.

In general, you should place your plants—both ornamental and edible—in odd-numbered groups. But rather than treating this as a hard and fast rule, take a commonsense approach: does it really matter if you have just planted twenty-one alpine strawberries or twenty? Probably not, because this is a massed planting whose effect is in its volume, not its detail. You can, however, easily tell the difference between a smaller group of four and five plants. This applies whether you are placing five small lettuces, five large cabbages, or five fruit trees.

## Height

The order in which plants are positioned in a planting bed should take into account plant height. Generally, layout in a planting bed is based on the plants’ height, with the tallest plants being placed in the back of the planting bed and the shortest in the front. Focal points (see page 54) are the exception—plants meant to be focal points are often placed in the center or front of a bed, surrounded with lower-growing plants.

In general, you never want to plant a low-growing groundcover at the back of a planting bed, behind a taller plant, because you won’t be able to see and appreciate it. When you integrate edibles into your planting beds, the approach becomes even more common sense. Don’t place strawberries, which will grow seven inches tall, at the back of the bed behind a six-foot tall

guava or ornamental shrub, because you won't be able to see and know when to harvest the strawberries.

Remember that your garden beds also need plants of varying heights in order to look good. Choose a mix that includes tall, mid-height, and low-growing plants for visual interest. If you do not know the growing habit of a plant, take some time to look it up. Reference books, the Internet, or nursery plant tags are a great place to start. While we advocate good pruning practices to control the height of your fruit trees and other larger plants, understanding the growth habit of a particular plant before you buy it will help you know how to arrange it within your planting beds for the best overall look and harvesting ease.



Harvest Frequency

How often you need to harvest your fruits and vegetables will also affect plant sequence. In an annual vegetable or mixed ornamental edible planting bed, slow-growing annual edibles like leeks should be planted in spaces that are harder to reach, like the corners or the back of a bed, where they can grow for eight to nine months until they are ready to be harvested. On the other

hand, edibles that you harvest frequently belong in more accessible spots in the front of planting beds. Salad greens are a good example: the best salads are picked daily. But how inconvenient to have to reach the back of your planting bed to harvest your lettuces each day . . . leaf by leaf !

Kale and braising greens are planted in the back of this raised bed, while lettuce is just starting to sprout in front. Not only is this arrangement visually appealing, but it is also more convenient to harvest lettuce for your daily salads from the front, while the taller kale and greens in back are harvested less frequently.

## Underplanting

Placing low-growing plants and groundcovers, which grow thick and close to the ground, underneath larger shrubs and fruit trees is a method for creating layers in the landscape. This technique, called underplanting, also covers potential bare spots in the garden and allows you to maximize food production.

Groundcover herbs like Roman chamomile and sweet woodruff, spreading edible perennials like strawberries, or ornamental flowers like campanula and omphalodes are all good options for repeating colors and textures throughout a garden. In addition to being a good use of space, there are other benefits to using groundcovers—they are great for controlling weeds, preventing soil erosion, and helping soil retain moisture. And, flowering ground covers can be used to attract bees and other beneficial insects.

Creeping golden marjoram makes a great underplanting to culinary sage and edible



flowers.

## **Principle #3: Year-Round Beauty and Harvests**

While you may have favorite seasons in your garden, there should be no point during the year when beauty and utility are not coexisting in your landscape. In order to apply this principle while planning your edible garden, you'll want to bear in mind a few key ideas, including incorporating perennial edibles, multiple blooming seasons, succession planting, and intercropping.



## Perennial Edibles

Annual plants are one-shot deals: as their name suggests, they start and end their lives all within a single year. Many of our favorite vegetables and flowers fall into this category, but they have a short season when they peak and cannot be relied upon to keep your garden looking good year-round. Plants that live for two years are known as biennials. Typically, in warmer climates, herbs like parsley and leafy greens such as chard and kale can live more than one year.

Then we have the elders: perennials, or plants that live longer than two years, such as fruit trees and shrubs. Perennials are the plants that provide structure for your garden. Perennial plants are either deciduous or evergreen. Deciduous perennials will lose their leaves and in the process supply visual interest in the garden with their changing foliage colors. Evergreen perennials, as the name suggests, keep their leaves, and provide consistent foliage color in the garden.

Perennials are especially important for maintaining the year-round aesthetics of your garden, as there may be times when you are not able to refresh annual plantings. When this happens, you can rest assured that the look of the garden won't completely unravel in your absence, thanks to your structural perennial plantings. In other words, as the pretty annual flowers and seasonal harvests come and go throughout the years, perennial plants are the ones that stay in your garden and grow with you.



Blooming Seasons

Your garden should have flowers and visual interest throughout the year. Too many gardens bloom brilliantly for three spring weeks and then lie dormant the rest of the year. To prevent this from happening in your garden, choose flowering perennials that have different blooming seasons; some of the flowers in your garden should bloom in spring, some in summer, some in fall and, if you live in a climate that supports winter blooming plants, some in winter.

**here are a few winter- and early spring-blooming perennial plants that provide seasonal beauty in your garden:**

aloe • camellia • correa • *Daphne odora* (try the variegated 'Aureomarginata') • grevillea • hellebores (all varieties) • leucadendron (we

love 'Safari Sunset') • mahonia 'Charity' • omphalodes • pieris • pink muhly grass • princess flower • rosemary • *Salvia holwayi* and *confertiflora*



The harvested winter

blooms of ornamental quince bring beauty to your home and garden.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LEFT: Winter-blooming aloe, 'Yuletide' camellia, *Salvia confertiflora*, pink muhly grass, and hellebores.



## Spring Blossoms

As your garden transitions from winter to spring, create beautiful seasonal arrangements using fruit tree blossoms and dramatic winter fruits. You can make a very simple arrangement with only flowering branches, which are striking enough to hold their own in a simple glass vase. Or you can slip sweet fragrant blossoms into a larger arrangement with other late winter and spring edibles like citrus and pea tendrils.

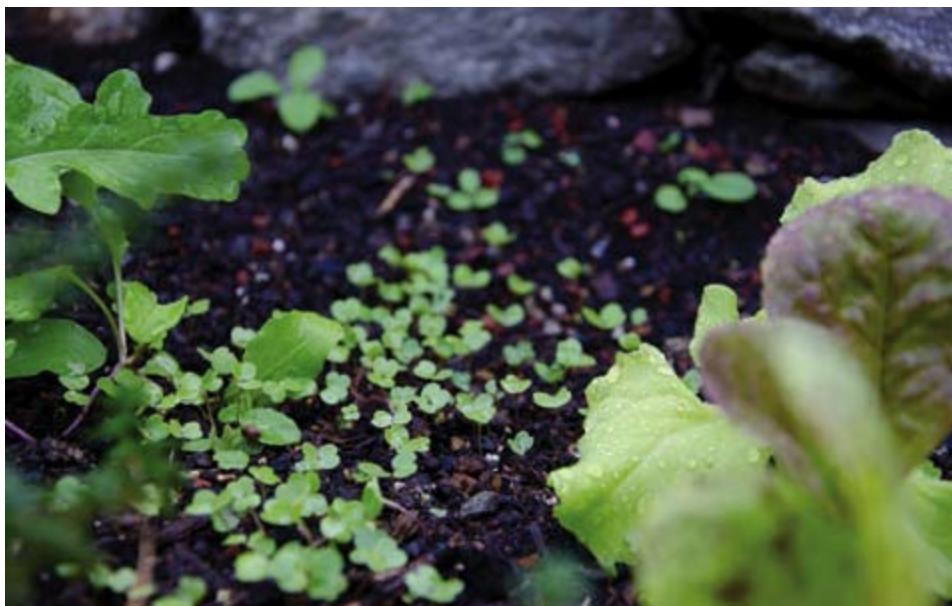


Succession Planting

Just as you want your garden to have year-round beauty, you also want it to be productive through the seasons. Succession planting is planting smaller

amounts of annual vegetables in phases over the course of the season so that you have regular harvests over a longer period of time, instead of a glut of produce over a short period of time. You can also plant a variety of perennial fruit tree and shrubs so that you have early, mid-, and late-season harvests.

We frequently hear from people who have tried to grow vegetables but failed or were disappointed. They explain that they had more than they could eat for a few summer weeks but then everything died. They blame it on a black thumb, but really, that's just what happens when you plant everything at once. If you go to a nursery, buy a bunch of transplants, and plant them all at the same time, it should not be surprising that they all need to be harvested at the same time as well. You might have food for fifty people for a few weeks and then nothing the rest of the year. Succession planting will prevent this situation.



Succession planting of arugula in a salad bed.

Instead of an abundance of food ripening at the same time, succession planting gives you a prolonged harvest evenly spaced over a period of time in quantities you and your family can consume. Growing lettuce is a perfect example, especially if you like to eat salads several times a week throughout the year or growing season. How do you plan for this? An easy way to start is to take a planting bed and divide it into three sections. Plant lettuce transplants (also called “starts”) in the first section, plant seeds in the second

section, and leave the third section empty. Three to four weeks later, you will be harvesting lettuce from the first section, you will have seedlings in the second section, and you will then plant more lettuce seeds in the third section. By the time your first section is done producing, your second section will be ready to harvest, and meanwhile, the third section will be growing and ready for you to harvest in the coming weeks. Then you can replant the first section with seeds and continue to follow this pattern. If the first group of lettuce provided you with too little or too much lettuce, you can adjust the amount you grow by adjusting the amount of seeds and space used in the third section. Soon you will have a good sense of how much you need to plant to meet your salad needs.

You don't need to limit yourself to a segmented vegetable bed—we only suggest this as a way to help keep track of what you've planted as you get started. You can use succession planting throughout your entire edible garden. Succession planting is particularly useful for quick-harvesting annuals like radishes and cilantro, and also for single-harvest vegetables like pak choi, leeks, and onions. If you want to enjoy these vegetables and herbs over an extended period of time, you'll need to plant them more than once.

Succession planting is also a good way to sneak in a second harvest of annual summer crops like green beans. You can stagger your bean plantings over a couple of months. Starting the first group by seed as soon as early spring's threat of frost is over gives you an early summer harvest. Don't stop there, though; four to six weeks later, you should plant another group. By mid- to late summer, the first crop of beans will have run its course and, instead of letting the plants trickle out a few more beans in one last spurt, take them out and replant a new group right away for a fall harvest. While you're waiting for the new plants to grow, you will be eating beans from



Fast-

growing radish can go from seed to harvest in just thirty days.

the second planting. The result is a steady supply of green beans from early summer through fall, which is perfect if you really like green beans.

Unlike annual vegetables, whose harvest depends on the time you plant them, the harvest of perennial edibles is determined by plant variety. Most fruit trees and shrubs have multiple varieties with different harvesting times. So, if you want to have a steady supply of a certain fruit, plan on growing more than one plant with multiple varieties with different harvest seasons. Early, mid-season, and late-harvest varieties exist for many perennial fruit trees and shrubs, including strawberries, apples, raspberries, blueberries, and pears. Harvesting time is an especially important factor when growing fruit trees like apple and pear, as their fruits are best if not left on the tree for long once they're ripe. A smaller, steadier supply of your favorite fruits can be much more enjoyable than larger amounts for a very short period of time.

## Intercropping

Intercropping is the practice of growing two or more different food crops in the same space at the same time. Home gardeners can maximize a garden's production by planting long- and short-season crops together. Longseason crops are larger annual vegetables that need more time to ripen, typically seventy to ninety days, whereas short-season crops are typically planted and harvested within a month. You can plant them together knowing that by the time the long-season crop has grown in and needs the space where you've planted the short-season crop, the short-season crop will have been harvested and no longer taking up space.

For example, you can plant red oak leaf lettuce or other red lettuce varieties in the spaces between tomato transplants in the spring. As you stagger the tomato plants in the bed (remember not to plant them in a row), there will be small planting spaces around the plants that can be used for the red lettuce short-season crop. By the time the tomatoes need additional space, the lettuce will have been harvested and enjoyed in a late-spring or early summer salad. Why red lettuces? They can handle direct sunlight and heat much better than their green counterparts (romaine being the exception) and thus can manage the full-sun summer-growing conditions needed by the tomatoes. The red color also provides a good visual contrast against the bushy green leaves of the tomato plant.

When choosing edibles to intercrop, it's imperative that you keep growing conditions and plant habit in mind. The tomato plant and lettuce combination described above is a good example: both plants grow well in summer's hot, sunny conditions. In the fall, intercropping salad



Fava beans do double duty in your garden. They replenish the soil, and the leaves, flowers, and beans are all edible, making for a wonderful meal. Succession plantings ensure a steady harvest.



# Market Arrangement



No matter what time of year, there is always a flower, herb, vegetable, or fruit that can inspire you to make a fun “garden-to-table” arrangement. Choose a simple vessel such as an empty tin can with a cool label, a mason jar, or a vintage vase from your own collection, and go to town clipping in your yard! Build the arrangement with a sturdy base using a variety of greenery and herbs, nestle in a few choice blooms that pack a visual punch, and then layer in some fruit for textural interest. For example, we’ve used grapes, dahlias, mint, lemon verbena, feverfew, jujubes, yarrow, zinnias, and heuchera in the arrangement on the left, and crab apple, basil, dahlias, zinnias, heuchera, and feverfew in the one below.

As florists, one of the simplest tricks of our trade is skewering fruit or vegetables to include in our arrangements. You can do this by taking a small apple, pretty pear, or cute jujube fruit and inserting a bamboo skewer into one end, making sure not to push the skewer all the way through. Cut the skewer down to size and nestle the fruit into the arrangement just like the stem of a flower. A bright bunch of grapes or crab apple–laden branch can make a surprising impact cascading down the front of your arrangement.



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greens with garlic bulbs is a good way to utilize unused space while you wait

for the garlic to sprout. The salad greens are shallow-rooted and quick-growing, so they won't interfere with the space needed for successfully growing garlic.

Planning ahead to replace plants at the end of their life cycle is another aspect of intercropping. Assess your current garden situation and determine how much time you have until the existing plants are ready to harvest or be removed. Then choose a vegetable whose maturation period matches that time. For example, if it is late spring and you know you've got another three or four weeks before your fava beans will be ready to harvest, you can maximize your space by planting a thirty-day crop like radishes. Or, start your next crop by seed. Bush beans or peas are a great choice. The seedlings will still be quite young by week three or four when you take the favas out, leaving the bush beans to expand and take over garden space.

## Principle #4: Unified Style

The gardens that look best are those that are clear about what they are. These gardens—and the gardeners who create them—have a focused style and everything included in the space supports, and is in unity with, this style. If you want to create a beautiful edible garden of your own, it is very helpful to have an idea of what style you want to achieve. The style can be whatever you want it to be; the key is to simply choose one and then stick with it.

You may want to consider choosing a style that reflects the nature of your home and your surrounding environment. A garden that is in tune with the regional climate has a stronger chance of survival, as plants will thrive without a lot of coaxing. So, depending on your climate, some design styles will work better than others. Keeping a planting design simple and more reflective of the surrounding environment can allow the true beauty of a garden to shine.

That said, you don't have to let your local climate limit your design ideas. Garden styles can be defined by the permanent features of a garden—that is, the hardscaping, a few key anchor plants, *and* the surrounding environment. The more strongly your layout communicates your design style, the more easily any given plant can be incorporated to support the chosen style. As you

create your mixed ornamental, edible garden, it makes sense to develop a strong framework for its design style so that you can add edible plants at liberty, without losing the intended design style of your garden.

Below is an introduction to some different types of garden styles, accompanied by lists of edible plants that work well with each style. This is not an exhaustive survey of garden design—we do not include every style of garden (and we won't tell if you make up your own!), but it's an overview that we hope will help you determine which style is right for you.

Varieties increase your options for finding plants that will suit your garden's style. For example, lavender can be used in all of the garden styles we describe, but for sprawling Mediterranean style gardens, 'Provence' and 'Grosso' lavender's larger size and density enhance the look of the garden. Likewise, in a cottage garden planting, the small size of a 'Hidcote' or 'Munstead' lavender is better suited for a mixed, varied effect in the planting beds.



‘Grosso’ lavender.





LEFT TO Right : Olive trees in a Mediterranean-style edible front yard; colorful pollinator-attracting blooms are the hallmark of a cottage garden; angular lines and strong hardscape help define this urban modern vegetable garden.

## Mediterranean

Inspired by the countries of the Mediterranean—especially Morocco, Spain, France, and Italy—these gardens can be as diverse as the countries of their origin. What they do have in common is their relaxed sensibility; use of fragrant, sun-loving plants; natural materials like stone and terra-cotta; and emphasis on growing food. Dedicated kitchen gardens and integrated perennial edibles are the norm.

### Mediterranean edible Plants

anise hyssop • artichoke • culinary sweet bay • caper berry bush • cardoon • citrus • fig • grapes • lavender • olive • pomegranate • rosemary

## Cottage Garden

Cottage gardens are known for being as individualistic as their owners. This beloved garden style is based on traditional rural European gardens that were designed with utility in mind. So, there has always been a place



LEFT TO Right : Apple trees are a natural fit for a traditional garden; sweet woodruff is a shade-tolerant edible groundcover that supports a woodland garden style; bold 'Buddha's Hand' citron is a great accent for tropical/exotic gardens.

for edible and ornamental plants to coexist in cottage gardens. Gates, arbors, trellises, arches, and large planting beds defined by curving pathways are

often thought of when this design style comes to mind. And don't forget the flowers! Fragrance and color are the hallmark of the cottage garden. Keep in mind that this style can look messy if not given a balanced design. Repetition of colors, textures and shapes, quantity, and hardscaping materials go a long way toward creating a cohesive look. There is so much going on in a cottage garden that making thoughtful choices for plants and hardscaping will really pay off.

### **Cottage Garden edible Plants**

apple • blueberries • chamomile • variegated citrus • currants • edible flowers (borage, calendula, nasturtium, pansies, climbing peas, roses, scented geraniums, violas) • elderberries • herbs (a wide variety) • Jerusalem artichokes • lavender (try 'Hidcote') • pear • sunflowers

### **Urban Modern**

This is our own hybridized name for the sleek, linear style of contemporary gardens inspired by urban materials and spaces. Recognizable by their use of clean lines, repetition of materials, geometric shapes, bold and contrasting colors, and mass plantings, these gardens can be identified by their minimalist design. Hardscape materials tend to play a big role in an urban modern garden; they might feature concrete, metal, wood, gravel, pavers, and salvaged and other eco-oriented materials. Sparse, waterwise plantings and evergreen foliage are often put to work alongside dominant hardscaping.

### **urban Modern edible Plants (Think sculptural)**

annual vegetables (massed plantings with the same distinctive color or texture) • artichoke • cardoon • citron • kiwi • passion fruit • pineapple guava • rosemary • sage

### **Traditional**

A white picket fence, a large tree in the front yard, a sprawling green lawn, a straight path to the front door edged with garden hedges and shaped shrubs—this is the garden that defines a traditional American style of landscaping. Hardscaping materials reflect the garden's home, so you will often see the use of brick, cobblestones, and cut-stone pavers in traditional gardens. You will also find contained, stylized vegetable gardens, inspired by European

kitchen gardens known as potagers, as well as fruit trees and shrubs.

### **Traditional edible Plants**

apple • culinary sweet bay • blueberries • cane berries (multiple varieties like raspberries, marionberries, and blackberries) • Chilean guava • myrtle-leaved varieties of citrus • currants • espalier fruit trees (espalier is a method of training a tree or shrub to grow in a flat pattern against a fence, wall, or trellis on horizontal wires) • herbs • pear • persimmons • quince • rhubarb • roses • strawberries

### **Woodland**

A woodland garden is defined by shade. This style of garden is all about being in harmony with its surrounding environment: shade, moisture, boulders, and lots of trees and green foliage.

### **Woodland edible Plants**

blueberries • currants • elderberries • gooseberries • huckleberries • mint • rhubarb • sorrel • alpine strawberries • sweet woodruff

### **Tropical/Exotic**

Typically found in warmer climates or near architecture inspired by warmer climates, this design style strongly reflects its surrounding environment. Known for its use of water features, bold colors, and large-leaved and tropical plants, a tropical or exotic garden is a playful, vibrant, and lush outdoor space that complements a variety of architectural styles.

### **Tropical/exotic edible Plants**

banana • ‘Buddha’s Hand’ citron • chile peppers • date palms (Medjool) • yellow variegated fig ‘Panache’ • kumquat • Kaffir lime • loquat • passion fruit • pineapple, strawberry, and other guavas • pomegranate • rhubarb

As you plan your garden, keep these four basic design principles in mind and refer back to this chapter. Strive for overall balance, mindful plant arrangement, year-round beauty and harvests, and a unified design style. These are key to creating a garden that will work for you—one that provides you and your family with beautiful surroundings and also produces food to

enjoy.



Two

## Creating Your Beautiful Edible Garden

Creating your own beautiful edible garden is easy once you know how. It comes down to five very manageable garden-planning steps that can be applied to almost any space. In this chapter we'll examine your garden's growing conditions and then discuss the five steps. Later in the book we'll demonstrate how to apply the steps in different contexts, including the front yard, backyard, and smaller spaces such as side yards and containers. Once you understand your growing conditions and the five steps, you'll be able to use this information as a basis to approach the design of your own garden.

35

## Get to Know Your Garden's Growing Conditions

Before getting to the five steps, it's important to look at your garden's growing conditions. Assessing the land accurately and then working with its natural orientations, rather than against them, will help you put each area of your garden to its best use. Understanding your soil and basic food safety will help you make good choices for your garden space. Most edibles require a certain amount of direct sunlight to thrive, so you'll need to know which parts of your front and backyards are the sunniest. Ease of watering is another consideration.

### Soil and Compost

All living things need water, food, and air to survive. In the case of plants, soil is where they get all three. With edible plants, we ask them to look beautiful and to provide us with the nutrients we need to be healthy. The more nutrient-rich your soil is, the more nutrient-rich the food you grow and eat will be. Healthy soil also makes all the difference between a garden that looks lush and beautiful and one that is yellow and anemic. So, the best investment you can make for your beautiful edible garden is really in the soil.

As we will discuss in chapter six, organic compost is the key to keeping your soil rich and healthy. Compost is rich in organic matter and host to a universe

of living microorganisms. Organic matter is the spongy, textured part of any soil type; it is important because it holds onto moisture and minerals and helps maintain spaces between the heavier clay, sand, and silt particles in soil.

All plants take up organic matter and nutrients from the soil as they grow. Edible plants—in particular, annual vegetables—are especially nutrient hungry and very quickly deplete the soil of organic matter. This means that any area in which you plant annual vegetables will need to be at least partially cleared out and have its soil turned each season, which requires thoroughly mixing in compost and fertilizer to maintain a crumbly soil texture with air pockets for oxygen circulation and healthy root growth.

Amending and turning your soil each year is not a good idea if you've got a tree or other perennial plant nearby that does not like to have its roots disturbed. Take that into consideration as you're planning your garden layout so that you'll be able to do regular soil maintenance. If you create a dedicated annual-vegetable bed, you can clear it out each spring and turn the soil without any hindrances. Including some perennial plantings in that bed can work, but place them carefully, either out of the way and along the edges, or in groups that you know you'll always



work around and leave undisturbed. Alternatively, if you choose to plant your annual vegetables in the midst of a larger perennial ornamental bed, remember to space the plants out so that you have enough room to get into the planting bed to add compost and turn the soil—or to at least wiggle the soil around a bit—each season. Remember that even though perennial edibles stay put in their planting bed, they too will appreciate it if you add compost to the surface of the soil around them at least once a year and till it in lightly with a hand tool.

### Food and Soil Safety

Many people buy organic products at the grocery store to make sure that the fruits and vegetables they eat are not contaminated with pesticides. And, one of the reasons people like to grow their own food at home is that they hope what they grow will also be clean, healthy, and safe. To make safe food-growing choices, there are some basic measures that are important for every home gardener to know.

Environmental conditions above and below the soil's surface affect the safety of the food you grow. Many food-safety precautions for growing food are just common sense once you are aware of them. In a nutshell, whatever is in the soil may also be in the edibles you grow and, if you eat them, introduced into your body. The old adage "you are what you eat" applies to what plants eat, too. So, when it comes to growing food safely, understanding what is currently in your soil and how to avoid exposing your soil to environmental toxins will help you make good design choices about where and how in your garden you will be growing food.



#### SOiL TESTiNg

Before you put a single edible plant into the ground, the first thing you should do is check your soil for contaminants (see page 174), specifically for heavy metals like lead, one of the most common and toxic contaminants in urban areas and in older houses. Lead is also often found in the soil near older houses because, up until 1978, many exterior housepaints were leadbased. Lead from peeling paint and other leaching can end up in the soil of what otherwise might seem the most pastoral of settings.

Odds are, most of your soil will be fine. If you do have any lead, it will most likely be within eighteen inches of the house exterior, so you should plant these areas with ornamental plants instead of edibles. If you do have lead in the rest of your garden, you can still grow food—you just need to take some precautions. Containers and raised beds can be placed on top of the lead-affected soil. A container has a bottom and thus the plants cannot access the soil beneath the container at all. A two-foot-high raised bed, which is open to

the ground, works for smaller annual vegetables because their roots do not grow large enough that they will come into contact with the lead-affected soil. For larger annual vegetables with more developed root systems, like tomatoes, it's a good idea to build the planting bed to at least two and a half feet high. Fruit trees are considered safer to plant in lead-affected soil because the lead does not transfer as easily into their fruit. Every situation is unique when it comes to soil contaminants though, so we recommend that you contact a local expert to discuss your options. Your local nursery, gardening association, and agricultural university extension service are good places to get referrals.

#### ChOICE OF maTERiaLS

The materials that you grow food in and around are also important. Many materials leach toxins into the soil and so edible plants should not be planted in or near them. For example, pressure-treated wood is a common building material found in many gardens, but it is known to leach heavy metals such as arsenic and chromium into the soil. If you spot pressure-treated wood used as fence posts, deck supports, retaining wall materials, and sometimes even raised vegetable beds—place your edibles away from it. It is difficult to get good information on how far arsenic travels in soil,



but because it is a heavy metal like lead, attempt to keep edibles at least eighteen inches away from any pressure-treated wood and test your soil.

Similarly, although salvaged and repurposed materials are all the rage in gardening, use common sense: if you suspect the materials might contain lead or other contaminants, don't use them or have them tested. Old paint is often lead-based, rubber tires can leach road toxins and magnesium, and manufactured wood can be full of glues and other unknowns. The more chipped or damaged the surface of the container is, the more easily it will leach whatever it's made of into the soil. If you already have a container planted with edible plants and have questions about

its safety, you can easily test its soil, too. Just hold off on your next harvest until the test results come back; you can then decide whether you're comfortable using the container for growing edibles.

Hardscaping materials that are considered food safe to use in your landscape

include untreated redwood and cedar, natural quarry stone, and terra-cotta clay. When in doubt, think untreated, natural materials. New products like food-safe wood stains and vegetable-safe pressure-treated wood are becoming more and more available. What you are and are not comfortable exposing yourself to is up to you; we simply encourage you to pause and think about food safety and to seek out more information about the materials you choose to grow food in.

aNimaL PaThOgENS

You can test for a lot of things. One contaminant that you can not test for however, is dog urine. Excrement from dogs and cats can contain pathogens that are harmful to humans. This issue is very important when you are growing food in an area of your garden that interacts with a larger community you cannot control. We don't ever recommend growing food in your front yard along the sidewalk, especially if you're in an area where people walk their dogs. We have seen homes with lettuce and kale being grown in the sidewalk strips out front, and while we applaud putting unused space to work for growing food, there is too much potential for food contamination



in these spaces for us to recommend it.

Similarly, if you have a cat or if your garden is visited by neighborhood cats, keep an eye out for signs that they are using your planting beds or containers as a litter box. If they have a favorite area to visit, you should not plant your food crops there. If you have decided to plant a certain area with edibles, you may need to discourage cats from visiting the area. Methods we've used that seem effective include covering planting areas with bird netting; staking the soil with bamboo stakes or chopsticks; spraying the area with garlic, soap, and chile-pepper water; and planting masses of highly pungent rosemary, onion, garlic, and oregano on areas outside of, or throughout, the beds.

### Light

Plants need light in order to grow, but just how much light is required

depends on the plant. Understanding your garden's sun exposure is a crucial step in choosing plants that will thrive in your garden. Plants are often referred to by their light needs; for example, tomatoes, peppers, and roses are all "full-sun plants." Likewise, hydrangeas, hellebores, and camellias are known as "shade plants." If you are longing to grow a sweet, large 'Brandywine' tomato and you have nothing but shade in your backyard, you are going to have to find a sunny spot or come to terms with the fact that the plant palette you have to choose from does not include large, juicy tomatoes.

Let's start with the basics: do you have a sunny or shady garden? Or, like most of us—do you have a bit of both? If you don't know, the most straightforward way to find out is to simply go outside and take a look. Take a walk outside and take note of which parts of the garden get sun during different parts of the day. This will involve a few different trips to your garden—at least one in the morning, one at midday, and one in the afternoon or early evening. You can use a compass to confirm what you see, but with or without one, you'll find that the parts of the garden that face east are likely getting morning sun and afternoon shade; the parts that face west get afternoon sun and morning shade. For people who live in the northern hemisphere, the sun is to the south at all times of the day; a south-facing part of the garden will therefore get sun throughout most of the day, with little to no shade at all. Likewise, any part of the garden that faces north will not get very much direct sunlight through the day at all, but there may be enough indirect light that there is not really ever any deep shade. Check for other shaded areas, such as those caused by a large tree or neighboring house. A south-facing bed that you assume will get good sun throughout the day may actually be in shade during certain hours of the day. Once you've figured out where and when the sun is hitting different areas of your garden, you can start to decide what sorts of plants make sense for each area.

The south-facing parts of your garden are getting six to ten hours of sun each day and are your edible-garden hot spots. Larger fruiting edibles such as beefsteak tomatoes, sweet bell peppers, and peaches need six to ten hours of direct sunlight in order to produce large sweet fruit. So, you should immediately stake out these full-sun areas as your prime location for your favorite full-sun edibles. It is also a great place for sun-loving perennial herbs and flowers such as salvias and dahlias. It's good to know that many full-sun

plants will tolerate an hour or two of morning shade, but they need the heat of direct afternoon sunlight to produce flowers and ripe fruit; this is especially true for larger fruits and vegetables. In fact, a good rule of thumb

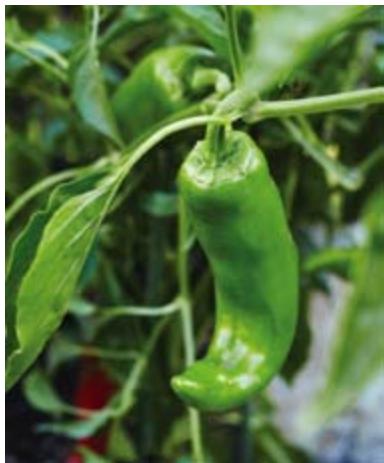


Heirloom tomatoes need full-sun growing conditions in order to develop their signature sweet flavor.

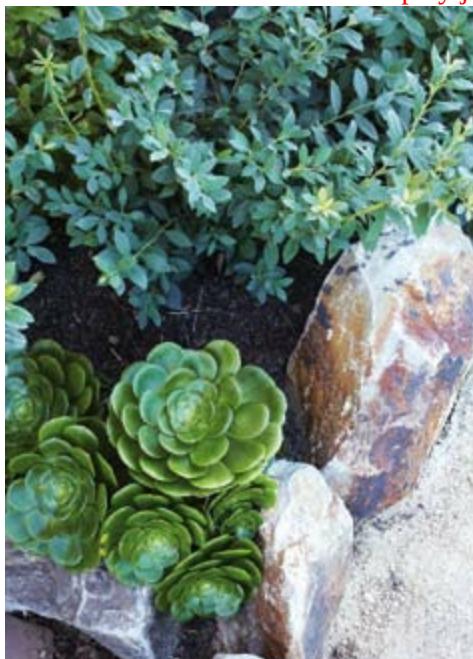
is that the larger and sweeter the fruit or vegetable, the more sunlight is required to ripen it. Many favorite summer crops fall into this category: they may grow decently with a bit less sun, but they need the last few hours of late-afternoon heat and sunlight in order to reach their peak flavor.

A west-facing area of your garden is getting light from midday until sundown—which in the summer can be as late as 8:00 or 9:00 p.m.; this solid five- to eight-hour dose of afternoon light and accompanying heat is still considered full sun and is the second best place in your garden to situate sun-loving edibles. Edibles with smaller, less sweet crops, such as green beans, hot peppers, cucumbers, apples, and pears will do well here.

Meanwhile, an east-facing area of your garden is getting about three to five hours of sunlight each day, but this is not the hot, late-afternoon sun that is needed to really ripen large tree fruits and tomatoes. Considered light



Spicy jalapeño peppers need less sun than most people think.



LEFT: Partial shade

planting bed with evergreen 'Sunshine Blue' blueberries and shadetolerant ornamental aeoniums. Right: Variegated pineapple mint and *Campanula primulifolia* are planted next to this metal container. The partial shade conditions help control the mint's rapid growth.

to part shade, east-facing areas are a good place to situate smaller or more delicate edibles such as snap peas, green beans, blueberries, lemons, limes, kumquats, rhubarb, and any edibles you are growing for their leafy greens. Ornamental plants that like some light but will get scorched in extreme heat are also good candidates for this area.

Last, depending on the surrounding environment, north-facing parts of your garden are likely in a state of light, part, or deep shade for much of the day. This is a fine place to plant leafy greens and herbs that like having some light

but do not particularly enjoy the heat and so can be planted in light or part shade during the summer months, and then in full sun in the winter.

In fact, planting in part or full shade can be a good strategy to extend the life of some annual edibles. During summer's high temperatures many herbs and salad greens can become stressed by the heat and bolt, producing flowers instead of leaves and going to seed. Annual herbs like cilantro, chervil, and even basil produce longer when grown in part shade during the summer. Planting in the shade can also be a method of controlling fast-growing



edibles like mint, an invasive plant that can quickly take over a bed in fullsun conditions. The lack of sun slows the plant's growth—giving you an opportunity to keep up with it and harvest often. Experiment with planting fast-growing edibles in light, partial, and even full shade to see what works for you. And if you are wondering what should you do with your deep shade spot, it is a great location for your compost bin (see page 176).



Place your

compost bin and in-ground mint garden in a shady garden spot.

### shade-Tolerant edibles

**FRUiTS aND BERRiES:** blueberries • small-fruited, less sweet citrus like lemons, limes, and kumquats • currants • elderberry • huckleberries • rhubarb • strawberries (alpine, ever-bearing, and June-bearing)

**vEgETaBLES:** arugula • Jerusalem artichoke • kohlrabi • leeks • mushrooms • pak choi • radishes • scallions • turnips and beets (grown for greens only) • leafy greens like celery, chard, chicories, collards, kales, mizuna, mustards, and salad greens

**hERBS aND EDiBLE FLOWERS:** anise hyssop • basil • borage • chervil (which must have shade during the summer heat) • chives • cilantro • dill • lemon balm • lovage • mint • nasturtium • pansies • parsley • sorrel • sweet woodruff • thyme • viola

## Water

When settling on a garden style, you will want to identify your garden's water source and make some decisions about how much or little you want to water your garden. Do you have an existing irrigation system, or will you need to install one? Do you have water restrictions or a desire to have a low-water garden?



## Mushroom Centerpiece



A shady patch in your yard is the perfect spot for growing your favorite edible mushrooms on logs. There are also mushroomgrowing kits that contain all the supplies you'll need if you want a fun indoor gardening project. Mushrooms offer a wide variety of color and texture to your garden and are fun to cultivate.

To show off their beautiful shapes and varieties, you can make a woodlandinspired tablescape with three or four different types of mushrooms perched atop a few small moss-covered logs.

In general, edible gardens are not low-water endeavors. Even so, you can still be waterwise. In many parts of the country, water is a limited resource. Even in regions where there is typically plenty of water it makes sense to plan for a future in which we are all being more careful with our shared resources. We'll talk about efficient watering systems and practices more in chapter six, but for now, know that one of the more important things you can do to be waterwise as you design your garden is to install an irrigation system that has the capacity to direct different amounts of water to different types of plants. Then you can group plants with similar water needs on the same water station or valve on your irrigation system. This way you are not over- or under-watering individual plants and, ultimately, wasting resources, time, and energy.

Lower-water edible plants do exist and are great additions to your garden. Many of the edible lower-water plants that you can use in the landscape are

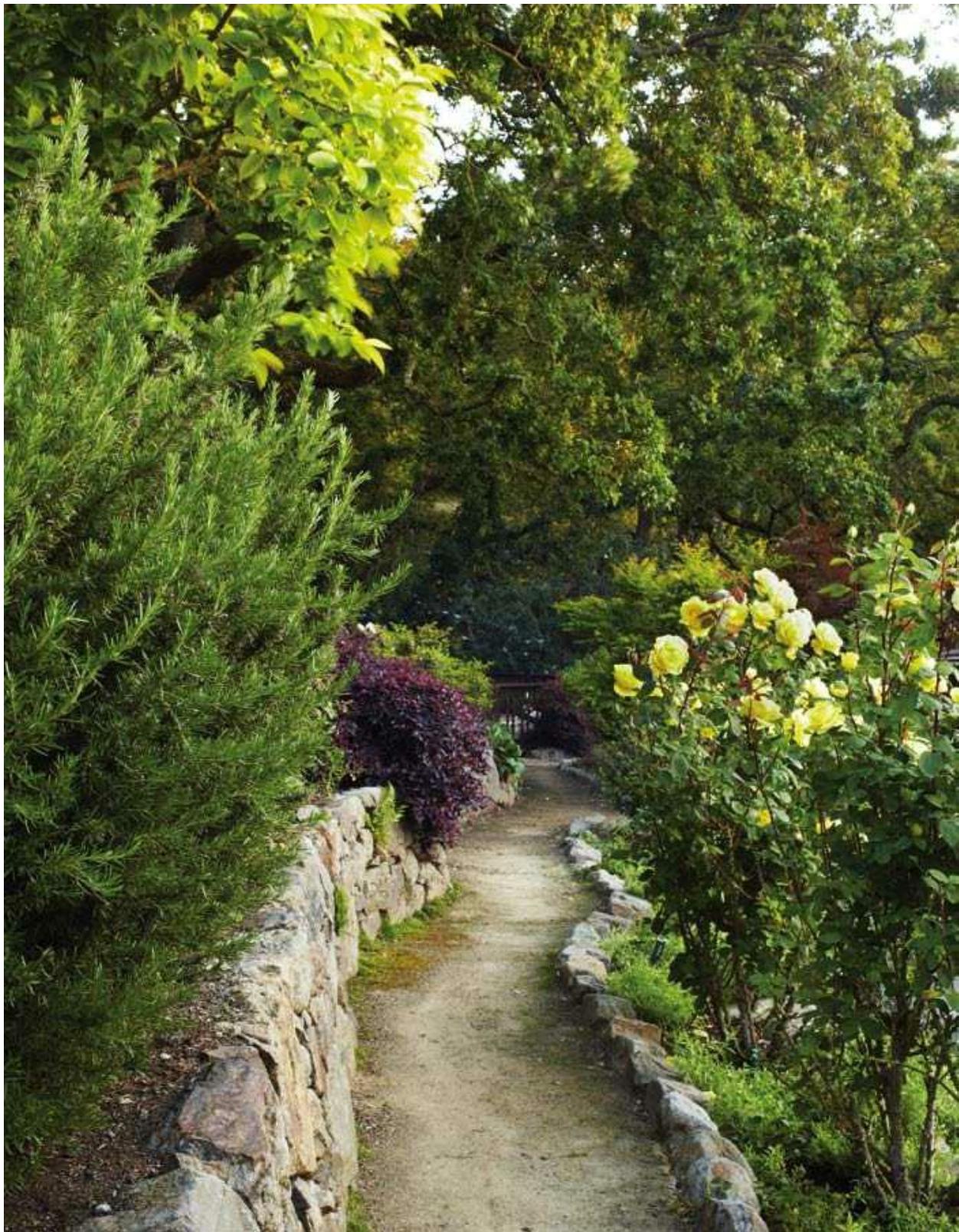
native to the Mediterranean, California, Australia, South Africa, and the Middle East.

**here are a few of our favorite lower-water edibles:**

apricot • artichoke • culinary sweet bay • caper • cardoon • fig • grapes • lavender • loquat • olive • oregano • pineapple guava • pomegranate • rosemary • sage • thyme

## Five Steps for Creating a Beautiful Edible Garden

After you've assessed soil, food safety, light, and water conditions, you're ready to start creating your garden. To achieve a space that is both beautiful and productive, plan your garden layout methodically. This way you can add elements to your garden purposefully and meet your goal of creating a garden that really works for you. The step-by-step process that follows is meant to be an introduction to the planning process; in later chapters, we'll explain how to apply these steps to specific garden spaces.



Step One: Arrange Permanent Elements

The location of permanent garden elements such as patios, sitting areas, pathways, fencing, planting beds, and lawns should be decided first. Once you have determined how you want to arrange them, they will be the con



Garden gate with mature olive tree and pollinator-attracting

nepeta.

PLaNTiNg BEDS

stant, unchanging parts of your garden space and the foundation of your garden's utility and style.

These permanent elements will define the space and how you move around in it. They are also usually heavy and more expensive than plants, and, if you move them around after plants are already growing in your garden, you'll risk damaging or killing your plants. For all these reasons, it's important to place everything in the right spot from the start, so make sure you are pleased with how they fit into and support your overall garden style and food-growing goals before moving on to other steps in your garden design process.

These are the garden spaces where your plants will grow. Planting beds are defined and contained by hardscaping materials and pathways. We refer to planting beds as ornamental, mixed ornamental and edible, and annual vegetable, with each describing the type of planting found within the planting bed. If you have the luxury of starting from scratch, the first permanent elements to place are your planting beds. If you are working with an existing layout, make any decisions about adding or modifying planting beds your

first step.

#### PaTiOS aND PaThwayS

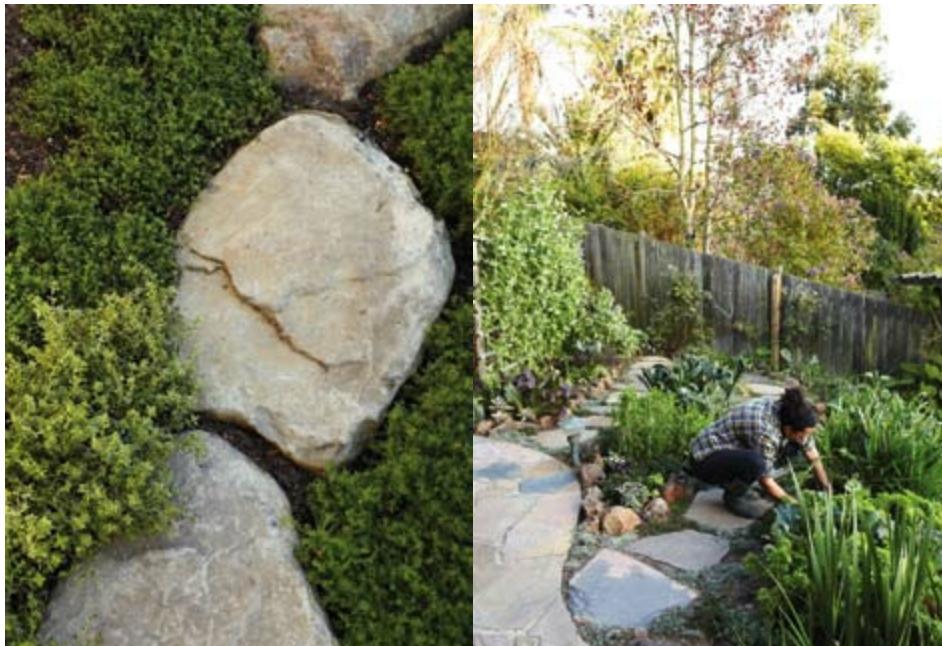
Patios and pathways define the garden, creating different destinations and leading you to them. If you are starting from scratch, think about how many people may be using the patios and pathways, what purpose they each serve, and what material you'd like to use. A patio can be a communal gathering space or secluded destination. A pathway can take you to a patio, garden bench, or garden gate—or can even just be a circular path with a defined start and finish. Choose one pathway material throughout, then either continue it as a basis for your patio or select a different material that complements the first. This will give your garden an overall cohesive look.



LEFT: This annual-vegetable bed, planted with chard and kale, is built of locally quarried stone with similarly warm-toned decomposed granite pathways surrounding it. Right: Pathways between annual-vegetable beds provide the space to maintain and harvest from your garden.

Patios and pathways can be made out of a variety of materials, but it is best to use permeable surfaces in the garden so that rain and other water can infiltrate through the surface to the soil below. This way, you can keep water on-site instead of having it run off into storm drains. Your fruit trees and

other deep-rooted plants can access this groundwater, reducing your need for irrigation. For these reasons, permeable options such as gravel, decomposed granite, and pavers with unmortared spaces between them are usually better choices than concrete. Use gravel or pavers for main access pathways because they drain more quickly and will not get mucky during winter rains. Groundcover herbs are often grown in the spaces between pathway pavers. Although this looks great and we encourage you to plant them here, it's best to cook with herbs harvested from your plantings beds, which are less likely to be contaminated by foot traffic, and reserve the herbs planted in your pathway for decorative and pollinator-attracting purposes.



LEFT: Line simple pathways with groundcover chamomile, variegated lemon thyme, and creeping thyme.  
RIGHT: Pathways between annual-vegetable beds provide the space to maintain and harvest from your garden.

You need a way to get from point A to point B in your garden without tromping all over your freshly turned soil and delicate plants. Ideally, main pathways should be about three feet wide, a comfortable size for a wheel barrel and strolling side by side with a friend. A secondary pathway through a planting bed can be as simple as a piece of stone or brick to step on. Make secondary paths a minimum of eighteen inches wide. In a perennial planting area, you'll be using the secondary pathway to pick flowers, fruits, and berries, and also to fertilize and mulch. Annual-vegetable planting beds require more frequent access to harvest, plant, fertilize, and turn your soil. So,

while an eighteen-inch pathway is fine between your vegetable beds, you'll need to have a wider main pathway nearby so that you can use your wheelbarrow to bring fresh compost to your beds a couple of times each year.

#### LawNS

Deciding whether or not to grow a lawn in your garden is an important decision. Lawns take up a lot of sunny space that could otherwise be used for growing food; most traditional lawn grasses are water-thirsty, and many require a lot of fertilizer and herbicide to stay green and lush.

There are ways to reconceptualize your lawn as a more productive space. First, consider how large your lawn really needs to be. A straightforward option for gaining more edible space is to simply reduce the size of your lawn. If you expand the planting beds that border it, you can cultivate them with edibles and pollinator-attracting perennials. When growing edibles alongside a lawn area, it is important to switch your lawn care to organic methods so as not to introduce toxic chemicals into the food you will be eating.

There are also alternatives to a traditional lawn that still provide an open look and space for family recreation. New “eco” and “no-mow” lawn options require less water, less gas-powered mowing energy, and fewer fertilizers. Or, consider a “lawn” of low-growing herbs, such as Roman chamomile, groundcover yarrow, or thyme. All of these attract pollinators such as bees, so they are not good choices for a recreational lawn, especially if you



have young kids running around barefoot. However, if the lawn is more for visual impact, these herb alternatives are a great way to achieve an open look while also creating more habitat for beneficial insects and increasing the productivity of your garden.

### Step Two: Establish Focal Points

Once you have arranged the permanent elements of your garden, the next step is to establish your focal points. Focal points are where the eye comes to rest in a garden. They help give a garden direction and energy. You have many options to choose from: a place to sit, a fountain, a piece of garden art, a single special “specimen” plant or tree, a central planting bed—or even a vegetable garden. The key, however, is that your focal point must be something permanent that is special or beautiful. When deciding on your garden’s focal point, think about what you love and then arrange the rest





This persimmon tree, covered with chartreuse-colored spring leaves, stands out among the evergreen 'Tuscan Blue' rosemary hedging. The tree is a focal point in this relaxed hillside garden.

of your design to highlight it. You can do this by making a pathway lead to your focal point, encircling it with low-growing plants, or giving it a

background of monochromatic plants so that it stands out. Focal points draw the eye by being a different material, color, or height than their surrounding environment.

Focal points should be in proportion to the scale of the garden and reflective of your chosen garden style. The larger your garden, the larger your focal point or points can be. You can also use focal points to enhance the sense of space in your garden. For example, in smaller gardens, a focal point toward the end of the garden's longest view—rather than right in the center of the garden—will create a more spacious feeling. Whatever you select, a focal point defines the character of the space and gives everything else in the garden a reference point.

### Step Three: Position Anchor Plants

Along with your permanent hard scaping elements, anchor plant ings are the structural framework upon which the rest of your garden is based. These anchors will define your garden through the seasons. Even in winter, when deciduous plants lose their leaves and patio furniture is put away, there should be strong elements in place that provide visual interest and that maintain the basic lines and flow of your garden.

Evergreen pineapple guava, blueberry, and ornamental blue oat grass work together to anchor this traditional front



yard border planting.

Use perennial plants as your anchors. They should be evergreen or, if they are deciduous, they should provide another element like height or strong branch structure. Many fruit trees work well for this purpose. Screening and hedging plants are often used for privacy, but their evergreen foliage can also serve as an anchor in your overall garden design.

#### Step Four: Add Plants for Beauty and Production

After you have finished placing the permanent elements and anchor plants in your garden, you are ready to choose additional plants that are beautiful and productive. These plants include perennial edibles (like rhubarb, artichoke, asparagus, lemongrass, and berries), annual vegetables (like peppers, eggplants, chard, onions, and celery), herbs, and flowers that you will add to the remaining spaces in your planting beds.

Just as your edible plants work for you, pollinator-attracting plants work for your edibles by providing a habitat for the pollinators and beneficial insects

that your edible garden needs. Pollination is what happens when pollen is transferred from a plant's male parts to its female parts. Without it, the development of new seeds and fruit wouldn't happen. The most effective way for pollen to move around from flower to flower is when it is carried by insects, also called pollinators. Pollinators include bees, butterflies, beetles, ants, and sometimes also birds. Even plants that can rely on the wind to distribute pollen will increase production significantly when they have support from visiting pollinators.

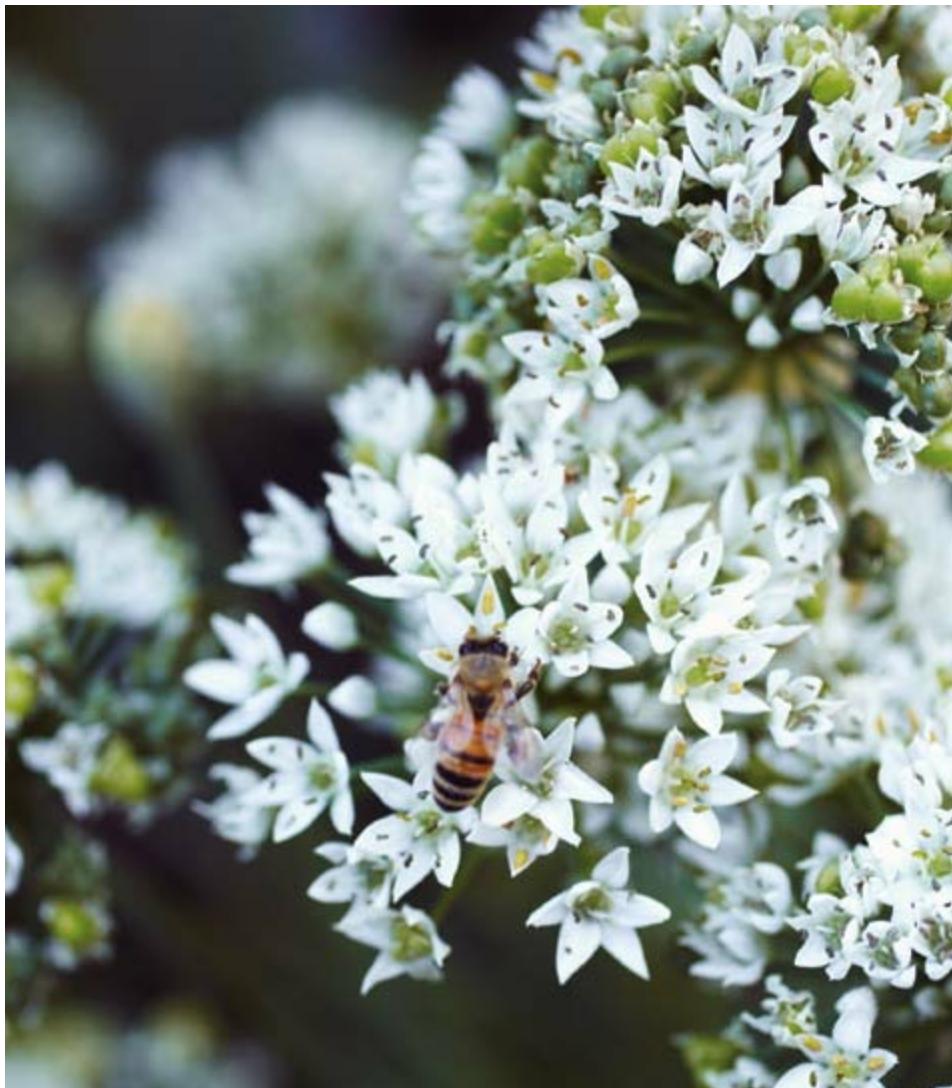
A healthy garden also needs a whole host of beneficial insects to help fight off unwanted garden pests. "Beneficial insect" is a general term that includes the above pollinators and also insects that prey on garden pests like aphids or mites. These pest-killers include ladybugs, green lacewings, praying mantis, assassin bugs, and some flies and wasps. Because this range of insects help keep each other's populations in check, you cannot have a healthy garden ecosystem without them.

Happily, the plants that are attractive to your local beneficial insects and help lure them to your garden are also attractive to us—we all like flowers! There are so many pollinator-attracting blooms to choose from,



This beautiful garden produces a rich harvest of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and cut flowers. Stone and decomposed granite materials are used for the permanent elements, including pathways and bed borders. Concentric, circular vegetable beds are the focal point of this space. Compact lavender hedging encircles the vegetable area, providing structure and screening through the year. Peach and apple trees further anchor the space. Globe artichokes and verbena attract pollinators and beneficial insects to the garden and are a great source for cut flowers. Edible lime thyme fills out the bed and adds vibrant color.

such as yarrow. Yarrow is the real workhorse of the garden. A beautiful, perennial, low-water plant, it is available in a wide range of colors and attracts ladybugs, lacewing bugs, hover flies, bees, and more. In addition to traditional perennial flowers to attract pollinators, you can cultivate herbs throughout the garden and let them flower.



go to flower.

Let your garlic chives



## Pollinator Arrangements

A bee's favorite flowers are some of our favorites, too. Yarrow has a wonderful sweet scent and comes in a wide variety of colors. Yarrow's texture is an excellent addition to your garden and lasts a long time in a flower arrangement. Mix yarrow with other pollinator flowers, especially flowering herbs. To make a small bouquet, pick a few stems of mint, sage, and chive flowers, scented geranium, yarrow, and the flowers of any other herbs in your garden. Hold the bouquet in one hand while adding in a few stems at a time. Once you have a bouquet in the size you want, choose an appropriate vase or small glass, give the stems a fresh cut, and place in the water.



LEFT: Apple blossom yarrow; Right: White-flowering yarrow.

Don't forget to include some of the flowers you really love—even if they are not pollinators' favorite flowers. Dahlias, hydrangeas, daffodils, and tulips all have a place in your garden if you like them. Mix them in with flowers that pollinators love too for a beautiful, productive, and healthy garden. It's easy to do regardless of your chosen garden design style, because there are so many flowers to choose from.

**here are a few of our favorite pollinator and beneficial insect-attracting plants:**

agastache • anise hyssop • blue throatwort • ceanothus • coreopsis  
• cosmos • crassula • echinacea • echium • erigeron • euphorbia • flowering  
culinary herbs • foxglove • germander • grevillea • helenium • lavender •  
nepeta • penstemon • rudbeckia • Russian sage • salvias • scabiosa • sedum •  
stonecrops • sunflower • sweet alyssum • verbena • yarrow • zinnia

TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Nepeta, salvia.

MIDDLE ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Lavender, flowering dill, echinacea.

BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Scented geranium, anise hyssop, agastache.







## **self-Pollination and Cross-Pollination**

Many plants are self-fertile, which means that pollen from one flower can successfully fertilize another flower on the same plant. Other plants must be cross-pollinated; they need pollen from another plant of the same or similar type to fertilize their own flowers. As you are laying out your garden, make sure that any edibles planted on their own are self-fertile and that any plants that need companionship are planted in groups of two or more. They don't need to be right next to each other, but the closer they are, the more likely the pollen from one will end up on the other instead of being lost in between.

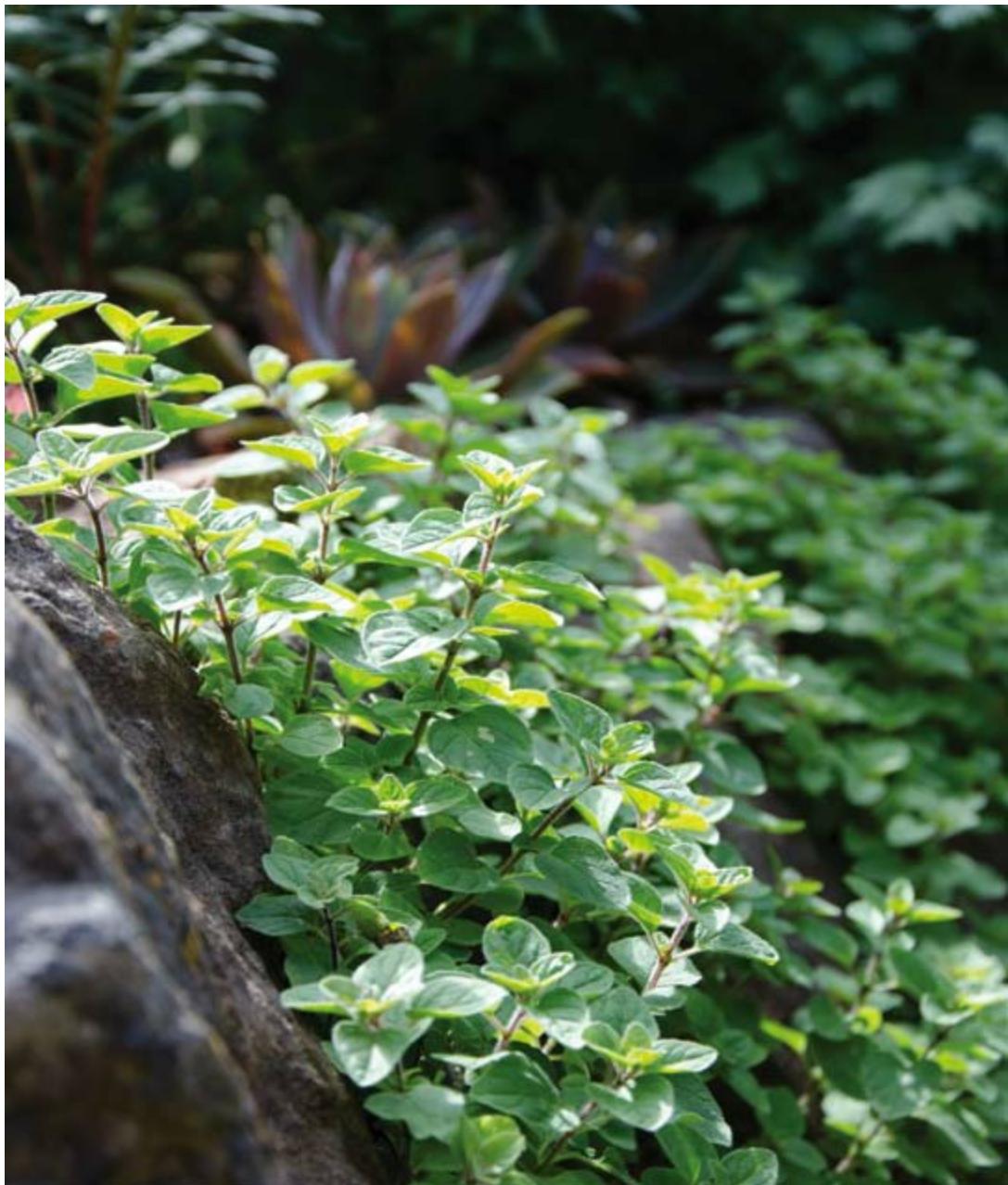
## **Step Five: Fill It Out with Groundcovers and Low-Growing Plants**

The last step is to fill in unused spaces with groundcovers and low-growing plants. Repeated throughout the landscape, they are an effective way to establish a balanced and cohesive look in your garden. Rather than ornamentals, use low-growing perennial herbs and edibles as groundcovers throughout your garden. Groundcover chamomile under a fruit tree can be repeated between flagstones in a pathway. If you use a variegated yellow-and-green ornamental grass in one part of the garden, repeat that same color scheme with a variegated lemon thyme. Remember common sense when harvesting—don't harvest and eat the ones that are planted in more pedestrian areas like the edges of driveways and sidewalks; instead, leave those to flower and attract pollinators to the garden or use as cut flowers in your home.

**some favorite edible groundcovers and low-growing plants include:**

SPREaDiNg FRUiTS: blueberries (low bush varieties) • cranberries • strawberries (alpine, ever-bearing, and June-bearing)

hERBS: chamomile ('Roman' variety) • Corsican mint • other mints (use only in contained areas and pull back from around bases of trees and shrubs) • oregano (try variegated 'White Anniversary' oregano) • rosemary (prostrate varieties) • sage (try 'La Crema', 'Tricolor', and golden varieties) • sweet woodruff • thyme (try 'Caraway', creeping, 'Spicy Orange', lime, variegated lemon, and silver varieties) • winter savory



Underplant

your ornamentals with groundcover herbs. Here, Greek oregano softens a planting of succulents and euphorbia, and cascades beautifully over a stone wall.

Now that we have walked you through the design principles of a beautiful edible garden and the five steps for planning a garden, you are ready to apply these ideas to your front yard, backyard, and other smaller garden spaces.

[Creating Your Beautiful Edible Garden 65](#)



**Three**

## The Beautiful Edible Front Yard

The front yard is a public space where we interact with our neighbors and larger community. It is also an important personal space because it greets us when we come home each day. Most of us try to create a space that we *and* our neighbors will like. Unfortunately, trying to make everybody happy doesn't usually yield the most creative results, and it's a reason many people avoid planting edibles in the front yard.

Growing food out front actually makes a lot of sense—especially if, as is the case for many of us, it is the only sunny spot on the property. The public nature of the front yard just means that you need to be more careful about how you do it. A productive front yard does not need to look like a farm. You can grow food and also cultivate the aesthetic you want in

OPPOSiTE: Kumquat and blueberry alongside ornamental mock orange, iceberg roses, euphorbia, rudbeckia, and geranium 'Rozanne' make a welcoming front yard planting.

67

your front yard by prioritizing your design goals and adhering closely to the principles of balance, arrangement, year-round beauty and production, and unity of style that were introduced in chapter one.

Growing food in the front yard also means that you will be sharing the food you grow. Keep this in mind as you plan your garden space. Unlike the more private backyard, you cannot always control who will harvest your edibles—human and animal visitors should be expected. There are solutions to this, though. For starters, you'll find that the closer to the house you plant your edibles, the less chance there is of someone coming into your garden and harvesting them. Likewise, using simple fencing or hedging to define your garden helps establish a clear delineation between public and private space. All this said, most people who plant edibles in their front yard are quickly reminded that one of the greatest joys about growing food is sharing it. If a passerby or neighbor picks an apple or two, consider it community building and know that your garden is giving you an opportunity to connect with the people around you.



Because the front yard is more public, you will probably want to reserve it for lower-maintenance plantings, such as perennial fruits and vegetables that don't require daily attention or harvesting. If you really do want to grow your annual vegetables such as tomatoes and squash in your front yard, you will have to do so carefully. Guidance for this approach is covered in chapter four.

Creeping thyme, nepeta, 'Berggarten' sage, succulents, and alyssum are a beautiful front pathway planting. These herbs are not for eating; here, they are appreciated for their foliage texture, flowers, and fragrance.



This modern edible front yard features strong hardscaping and edible plants: pineapple guava anchors the left-side planting bed, blueberry hedging runs along the house wall, Meyer lemon grows in a container at the front door, edible passion fruit winds its way up the mailbox and porch fencing, espaliered citrus and stone fruit trees serve as a living fence between neighbors, chamomile and thyme are planted as groundcover between pavers, and annual vegetables and culinary herbs are contained by corten steel planters.

Before you begin applying the five steps to creating a beautiful edible garden

to your front yard, start by assessing the space in your front yard. As discussed in chapter two, you need to know the growing conditions of your garden before you start. A full-sun front yard is going to require a different planting than a shadier space. Take some time to understand the front yard's light exposure so that you can make appropriate plant choices. Consider your water needs and plan accordingly. Because the front yard is not likely to be your primary space for annual vegetable production, it is a good space to grow perennial edibles that require less water and less maintenance.

Now you're ready to employ the five steps. In this chapter, we'll show you how to make decisions about permanent garden elements and focal points for the front yard. Once the hardscaping and anchor plants have been placed, you'll have a structure to work with and can begin filling in with edible and ornamental plants for year-round beauty and harvests, adding low-growing groundcovers for a finishing touch.

## Step One: Arrange Permanent Elements

Your front yard's permanent features will likely include a pathway to the front door, an access pathway to your side yard or driveway, and perhaps a fence or a gate. As you decide how to lay these features out, begin by taking a look at the style of your home. The materials and colors of its exterior should inspire your landscape choices. You should also make sure that the permanent features you choose fit in with your garden design style.

### Fencing

If your front yard is where you'll be spending a lot of time tending your garden and entertaining friends and family, you might want the buffer that a fence provides between your private garden and foot traffic from passersby. Sturdy fences with trellising can serve as supports for edible plants, and contain and tame perennial vining fruits such as kiwi, passion fruit, raspberries, and grapes. You can also use edible plant materials on their own to achieve privacy (see Edible Hedges, page 89).

If deer are a problem and you don't want to limit your front yard planting to deer-resistant edibles, you'll need to build a fence that is a minimum of six

feet high. Your fencing will need to be even higher if you are on a slope, as deer will be able jump over the fence and into your garden from above.

Espalier fruit trees are a great way to establish a boundary but maintain visibility; they can be a perfect solution for front yard fencing. The trees will actually encourage interaction in the sense that you'll likely share some of the fruit with neighbors; at the same time though, they define the limits of the interaction, helping to maintain the space within the "living fence" as a personal space.

### Front-Door Walkway and Other Paths

Don't forget the nuts and bolts of how you use the front yard. If you park in the driveway, you need to give yourself space to step out of



Alternating fan- and cordon-trained espalier fruit trees make up this living, edible fence. The fence includes 'Pixie' mandarin, satsuma, 'Bearrs' lime, cherry, Asian pear, and apple.

your car comfortably and walk to the front door. If an access pathway is used

regularly, we recommend using a durable material like flagstone, brick, or packed gravel that won't get too soggy during the rainy season (see page 52). Don't forget pathway basics, like making sure your pathway is wide enough for two people to walk on side by side or to wheel garbage bins in and out of the garage each week.

## **animals in the edible front Yard**

The open nature of the front yard means that not only are we sharing our front gardens with the surrounding community, but also their pets. As discussed in chapter two, we can plan for this and take safety precautions by not planting the foods we eat near the sidewalk and entry pathways where they can easily be exposed to contaminants. Instead, tender annual vegetables and low-growing fruits should be grown in raised beds, containers, and in the planting beds closest to your home and front door. Being aware of food safety practices (see page 37) and using common sense go a long way in keeping your home-grown food safe to eat. Keep this in mind as you make plant placement decisions.

Deer can also be a concern. Typically, it is the front yard landscape that suffers from deer damage because it is often unfenced. These unwanted harvesters are much harder to keep out of your garden once they discover that you have planted some of their favorite foods, so it is important to consider their eating habits before you add new plants to your garden. Oddly, what is considered deer-proof in one garden may not be so in another, because deer, like people, have their own individual eating preferences. If deer are an issue in your neighborhood, take a walk and see what they are eating and avoiding in your neighbors' yards. If they are eating a plant down the street, they will probably eat it in your garden, too.

As a general guideline, deer do not like highly fragrant plants. Lavender, rosemary, and salvias are therefore good options; planted densely as a hedge, they can even help deter deer from the more delectable plants in your yard. When planting fruiting and ornamental trees, go for the largest size you can manage. Deer love new growth, so by starting at a height that is difficult for them to reach, you give the trees a fighting chance. Another tip: before investing in multiple plants or shrubs, why not buy a single



‘Goodwin Creek Gray’ lavender.

one-gallon size and try it out first? Leave the plant out in your front yard for a few days and see if the deer take a bite.

**here are a few edibles that are commonly considered deer-resistant:** artichoke • culinary sweet bay • cardoon • chives • echinacea • fig • garlic • lavender • leek • lemon balm • mint • olive • onions • pineapple guava • pomegranate • rhubarb • rosemary • saffron crocus bulbs • sage • thyme

RighT: ‘Violetta di Chioggia’ artichoke.

BELOW: Culinary sweet bay pruned in a traditional globe style adds formal punctuation to an open front yard landscape.





Standard-form Meyer lemon is a beautiful and productive addition to this traditionalstyle front yard pathway planting. Its sweet yellow fruits provide a burst of needed color in the winter landscape.

## Planting Beds

Whether you are starting from scratch or working with an existing layout, consider both food production and appearances when you make decisions about where to locate your front yard planting beds. As mentioned before, the areas closer to your house and especially the front door are going to be the best suited for growing food because they are easily accessible to you and more difficult for the general public and animals to get to (see page 68). From a design standpoint, a planting bed running along the front wall of your house is important; evergreen plant material placed here helps make the front of your house look less exposed and screens the foundation and any unsightly vents or crawl space access points.

## Step Two: Establish Focal Points

Without a carefully chosen focal point, the view of your front yard garden can feel flat and boring. Using large trees and planting containers are both effective ways of establishing focus and guiding the view of your front yard. Happily, both of these options can include edible components and so are an easy way to integrate productivity into an attractive front yard.

### The Front Yard Fruit Tree

You have probably seen the fruitless, ornamental front yard plum tree many times before; like ornamental pear, flowering cherry, and ornamental crab apple, it is a standard element of American landscaping. Once you have decided to grow food at home, the simplest way to begin is by replacing these ornamental trees with your favorite fruiting varieties.

Regardless of what its fruit tastes like, a good focal-point tree should be beautiful enough to stand as a prominent visual feature of your front yard. While some fruit trees, such as pomegranate, citrus, and olive, tend to be grown in a multitrunk style, with branches starting lower to the ground, you should be looking for a statuesque fruit tree in a *standard form*, or single trunk style, for your focal point. Keep in mind that although all fruit trees require some upkeep to avoid looking messy, some are easier to maintain than others. For this reason, we do not recommend high-maintenance cherry trees or sprawling avocado and fig trees for prominent front yard plantings.

A persimmon, on the other hand, is a great choice for a front yard tree. There are Asian and American varieties that can be grown throughout the country in varying climates. Both Asian types, Fuyu and Hachiya, are especially beautiful trees with graceful, reaching canopies. The persimmon tree's fruit and attractive, changing foliage provide visual interest throughout the seasons. In spring, new leaves are a vibrant, chartreuse-green with matching flowers. As they age through the summer, the wide, rounded leaves, reminiscent of a magnolia, are full and provide great shade. In the fall, the yellow-orange color of changing persimmon leaves is vivid against the landscape, and, as the leaves fade and fall away, the brilliant orange fruits remain hanging on the branches through late fall and early winter, like modern holiday tree ornaments.

Apples, pears, and apricots also make great front yard focal-point trees.

Apples are particularly versatile, as many are suited to colder climates.

The key to using fruit trees in your front yard lies with choosing semi dwarf varieties and making sure you prune them in summer for both aesthetics and easy harvest (see page 198).



### **Persimmon salad**

If you are not familiar with the smaller Fuyu persimmon, seek it out. Unlike the Hachiya and American native persimmons, which have to be very ripe and soft before they are ready to eat, the Fuyu is crisp and can be eaten just like an apple. Fuyu fruit is the star of a winter salad: a little arugula, sliced

persimmon, walnuts, pomegranate seeds, and some good olive oil and salt are all it takes to bring the joys of your persimmon tree to the table.









## Persimmon Wreath

Creating a fruit-laden wreath with your favorite backyard clippings is a great way to bring fall's color and texture indoors. You can assemble this wreath using a few simple floral supplies from your local craft store and a pile of fall bounty from your garden. The wreath showcases a festive autumn palette using succulents, persimmon, bay laurel, privet berry, and berry sprigs cut fresh from the patch.

### SUPPLIES

20 stems of seasonal greenery  
12" wire wreath frame  
Medium-gauge paddle wire  
5–8 small- to medium-size succulents  
5–10 pieces of 20-gauge 12" straight floral wire  
15–25 small- to medium-size persimmons  
10 berry sprigs

1. Start by cutting down large branches so that you're working with pieces of greenery that are 5–10 inches in length.
2. Make small mixed bunches in your hand using 4–5 pieces of the seasonal greenery (we used bay laurel and privet berry).
3. Lay the small bunches on the wreath frame and wrap the paddle wire around the bunches of greenery and the frame



two or three times to make sure they are securely attached.

4. Continue making and attaching bunches, one on top of the next, until you've worked your way around the entire wreath frame.
5. To add on the succulents, begin by cutting them from the soil, leaving a small 1- to 2-inch stump to attach the wire to. You may need to remove a few lower petals to make the stump long enough to attach the wire. Wrap a piece of the 20-gauge wire around the stump two or three times making sure you leave 4–5 inches to attach it to the frame with. Tie the succulent onto the frame and twist the wire ends in place. Add two or three succulents in the same area for a clustered look.
6. The persimmons can be added in the same manner as the succulents. To attach the persimmons, begin by wrapping your 20-gauge wire around the base of the persimmons, and tie them in the same way as the succulents to the frame. You can add persimmons in just one spot to create a focal area, or cluster several small persimmons together in various places to mimic the clustered look of the succulents.
7. Tuck the berry sprigs into the wreath.

## Container Plantings

Large containers can be a beautiful front yard focal point. Planted with a citrus like Meyer lemon or the more unusual citron, also known as 'Buddha's Hand', and placed on the front porch, in the garden, or by the front door, containers have the presence to command attention in your front yard. Other



perennial plantings, especially evergreen options such as topiary bay laurel, rosemary, or, depending on your climate, other culinary herbs, are a great choice for a focal-point container because you can rely on these plants to provide a consistent look throughout the seasons.

If the front yard is truly your only sunny spot to grow annual vegetables, you can maximize your productive space by planting smaller varieties of tomatoes or cucumbers in large containers. A container by the front door can be an excellent place to grow foods like lettuce or soft berries that are susceptible to sidewalk contaminants or that are

likely to be picked by passersby. Similarly, sprawling edibles like zucchini, ground cherries, or tomatillos that you might not otherwise want to plant in the front yard suddenly feel much more structured if you place them in a substantial planting container that can provide fixed visual lines against their loose forms. You'll need to be sure to select annual vegetables with growth habits suitable for containers. Bush and determinant varieties of zucchini, cucumber, and tomatoes are all suitable plant choices because these are more compact and can look attractive in a large container with trellising. Bear in mind that you'll need to keep your annual edible plants pruned and disease-free so that they are a welcoming and pleasing focal-point planting.

## Step Three: Position Anchor Plants

In addition to permanent, structural elements such as pathways, patios, and other hardscaping components, evergreen plants and fruit trees can act as anchors to establish structure in a landscape. An easy way to make your front yard more productive is by pulling out the larger ornamental anchor plants in the yard such as trees, hedges, and shrubs and replacing them with edible varieties that anchor the space just as well.

### Evergreen Anchors

A few key perennial edible evergreen shrubs and trees are ideal go-to's for the front garden. They are fantastic double-duty choices because they produce food and anchor different areas of the garden through the year. These edibles can be substituted for more common ornamental plantings in a range of garden settings and styles.

#### BLuEBERRiES

First and foremost: blueberries! Blueberry bushes are great problem solvers in the garden. Their ability to grow in difficult conditions make them a versatile plant for many situations. They thrive in acidic soil, are shadetolerant, and have very shallow root systems. They are a good shrub choice for underplanting existing trees with large root systems—especially trees, like pines, that create acidic growing conditions. While many edible plants struggle with lower soil pH, blueberries thrive. Blueberry bushes produce best with regular watering and should be planted with trees and shrubs with similar water requirements.

Blueberries have pretty, delicate leaves with white or pink flowers that grow into berries. The shrub's small form is not hugely distinctive, so it works well in any garden style. In fact, unless people look closely at the plant, they might not even realize that it's a blueberry bush. This makes blueberries a terrific choice for front yard edible plantings; many people will walk right by without even realizing that they are missing out on delicious fruit.



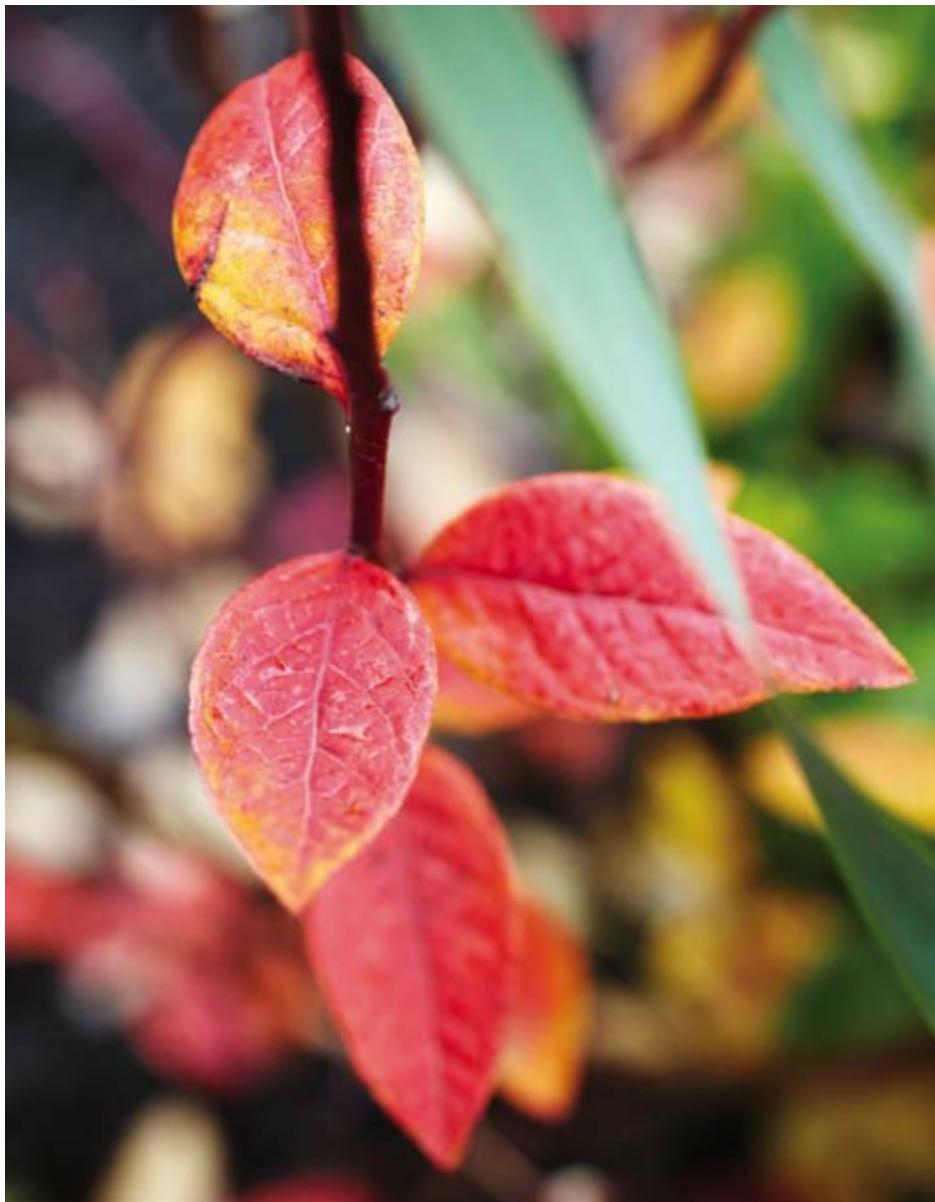
Evergreen 'Sunshine Blue' blueberries make an unexpected edible hedge in this woodland-style garden.

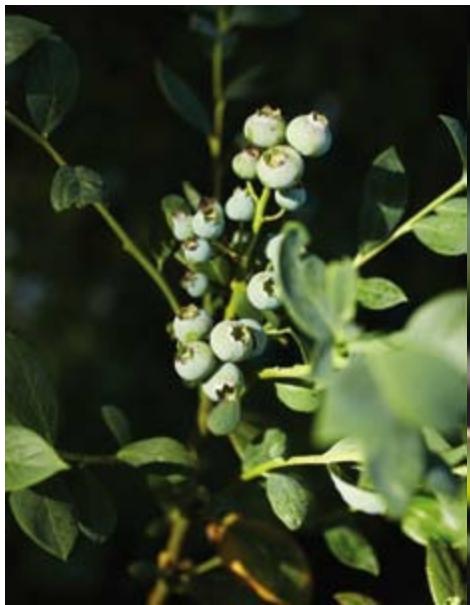
Blueberries produce most heavily in full sun, but do well in partial shade and even full shade conditions. Because of their flexibility, they make a great transitional shrub, providing continuity between a shady and a sunny planting bed. Because they can also be repeated throughout a landscape, they are helpful in establishing balance in an edible garden. Evergreen blueberry varieties such as 'Sunshine Blue' are excellent anchor plantings. You can also use them as hedging, as low screens along a house foundation, or to define a pathway or other border.

There are also deciduous varieties of blueberry bushes that provide year-round visual interest in the garden. The leaves have lovely fall color—vibrant reds, oranges, and yellow—and in winter, after they have lost their leaves, their branches turn a gorgeous coral-red hue that pops on a gray day.

Blueberries can grow up to eight feet tall over their lifetime, but you'll seldom see them that size in a home garden. They are slow growers, so with occasional pruning it is easy to keep them at the size you want. However, this also means that if you want them to make an immediate impact as an anchor plant that gives the garden structure, you should start with a three- or five-

gallon-size plant from the nursery. For a front yard hedging or foundation screening, make sure you select evergreen varieties standing about three to four feet tall.







LEFT: Deer-

resistant culinary sweet bay is a beautiful evergreen anchor in a front yard mixed ornamental, edible landscape.

Right: Glossy green bay leaves.

#### CuLiNaRy SwEET Bay

Culinary sweet bay is an excellent anchor and hedging plant. It is a beautiful evergreen tree that fits into almost any garden design style and can be pruned into topiary shapes or kept as a more natural-looking shrub. With its glossy green leaves, it always lends a classic, sophisticated look to a space, whether it's rustic or formal. With pruning, this tree is at home in a small patio garden

or as an anchor planting in a more expansive landscape.

Despite its sleek look, sweet bay is tough and versatile. You can count on it to take full sun, part shade, and strong wind, so it's a strong problem solver in the garden. Like blueberries, sweet bay is also a discreet edible—many people will not recognize it as something to eat. You will appreciate it as a culinary addition to your kitchen; it makes a big difference to have it on hand, fresh from the garden.

Left alone, sweet bay can easily grow into a thirty-foot-tall tree. Unless you want a tall tree, you will need to prune your bay tree regularly. Bay branches and leaves are a wonderful addition to floral arrangements, so when you prune you'll have cuttings to use in bouquets, seasonal wreaths, and table settings.

#### CiTRuS

If your climate is suitable, citrus is another great choice for the front yard. It is hard to imagine a Mediterranean-style garden without it. However, like blueberries, it is an understated plant and can be used as anchor plantings in almost any garden style.

Lemons, limes, oranges, citrons, and kumquats—all of these are evergreen, and their brightly colored fruit provides a splash of color during winter months. The variation in foliage alone is amazing. Whether you choose the dense, glossy, large-leaved oranges and lemons, the white-andgreen variegated leaf of the 'Pink Lemonade' lemon, or delicate myrtle-leaf varieties like the sour Chinotto orange or Australian finger lime, citrus is an anchor plant that is pretty enough to serve as both a backdrop and a more dramatic accent planting.

Citrus is particularly useful in front yard edible gardens. The largerleaf varieties are especially good for screening house foundations and can fill a bare garden corner nicely; it is also perfect for camouflaging building flaws or drain pipes. Choose dwarf varieties to plant in containers to place near your front door or on a porch. You'll appreciate their fragrant blooms each time you enter your home.

Citrus is quite versatile in terms of growing requirements. Many people think

you need to live in Florida to be able to grow citrus, but as long as you can keep them protected from frost in the winter, they will be fine. Smaller-fruited, less sweet citrus such as lemons, limes, and kumquats are especially shade tolerant and will happily grow, with just a little less fruit production, in a shadier garden, even in chilly San Francisco. Some gardeners in the Midwest grow them in containers on wheels and

bring them indoors in winter.



Kumquat.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Satsuma tangerine, lime, Kaffir lime, variegated 'Pink Lemonade' lemon, Meyer lemon blossom.

We haven't even talked about the fruit! Kumquats are one of the great garden snack foods. No need to peel—simply toss one in your mouth. Like other citrus, they make a delicious marmalade. Meyer lemons are another favorite: thin-skinned and a little sweeter than Eurekas, they are a must in any garden. There are also orange-skinned limes ('Rangpur'), highly decorative (and delicious) variegated lemons, calamondins, the unusual 'Buddha's Hand' citron, Kaffir limes, and sour and sweet oranges.



A large, sweet orange tree underplanted with pink muhly ornamental grass is a striking evergreen component of this driveway planting.

PiNEaPPLE guava

The pineapple guava is a versatile shrub

that is admirable for its silver-hued evergreen foliage and ability to adapt. Perfect for mixed borders and planting beds that hide unsightly foundations, it can be used in a modern silver-accented garden or to balance out a Mediterranean planting with similarly colored olive trees, lavender, and artichokes. Its silver leaves also do a great job lightening up darker corners and providing a backdrop for foliage and flowers in green or other colors. It is also a good



Flowers of the pineapple guava

are edible, too.



The silver-

hued leaves of the evergreen pineapple guava shrub blend seamlessly into this mixed edible,

ornamental front yard planting bed.

choice if you want to reduce your water use in the front yard. You'll rarely find the supersweet, soft fruit in a store, making it an even better choice for your garden. It is one of our favorite fruits, appreciated as a fresh dessert, in jam, or for cocktail infusions.

## Edible Hedges

Hedging of one kind or another can be used for structure, screening, and privacy in many front gardens. As you can guess, it can be edible, too. Taller hedging plants can be used for screening and privacy along a fence or for creating a wall. Lower hedges are good for defining garden spaces and creating borders along a sidewalk or driveway, or between neighbors. The key to a good hedge is uniformity. A hedge planting should be done with the same plants, all of which are the same size. Pruning them as they grow will help maintain a uniform look.

Both blueberries and culinary sweet bay, as mentioned previously, are good edible hedging plants for cooler and warmer climates alike. Citrus hedging is only an option in milder climates. Be sure to choose semi-dwarf and not standard varieties, because the foliage begins lower on the plant. Some citrus plants also have thorns, so place them away from high traffic areas or choose thornless varieties to use along pathways that have high amounts of foot traffic. The leaf size and shape of myrtle-leaf varieties is reminiscent of traditional boxwood hedges, which makes them an easy swap for an ornamental plant.



Culinary sweet bay is a perfectly discreet edible hedge in this front yard garden, situated on a busy city street.

If you want to use edibles as a hedge, it helps to plant them a little closer together than usually recommended for a more solid, hedgelike effect. How many plants you use for your hedging will depend upon how much space you have, but if the hedge is going to be a small one, keep asymmetry in mind and use odd numbers of plants for a more balanced look.

#### **some additional edible hedging plants include:**

cranberry, currants, and gooseberries (for larger, less-formal hedges only) •  
lavender • pineapple guava • rosemary ('Tuscan Blue' and upright varieties)

#### **Fruit Trees**

Even if your climate does not support evergreen edibles, there are many fruit trees that can be used as anchor plantings in the front garden. Unlike a focal tree, fruit trees used as anchor plantings are not highlighted as a special visual feature. While one or two of your fruit trees may have the presence to serve as your focal point, additional anchor fruit trees can be planted near the house to screen the foundation or be incorporated into a larger planting bed. Use the

size and style of your front yard garden as a guide in selecting additional fruit trees to use as anchors.

Olive, quince, crab apple, medlar, fig, and pomegranate are several fruit trees that can be used as anchor plantings in a front yard. Each is beautiful in its own right and can be used to good effect in your garden.

Olive trees are, by nature, large trees, so plant them only if your space can support them. Their slim, silver-toned leaves can really set the stage nicely for an elegant Mediterranean

or urban modern-style planting.



Manzanilla olive.



Evergreen rosemary and a rusty metal arbor anchor the entrance to this rustic edible front yard. An apple tree anchors the right rear corner of the garden.

Quince trees are covered with white and pale pink, highly fragrant flowers in spring and can easily be kept quite small. Along with its relative, the pear tree, it is a good fit for a cottage- or traditional-style planting bed. There is no reason to plant a flowering nonedible crab apple tree when the edible variety is just as lovely and produces edible fruit. This tree has a showy burst of spring flowers and is adaptable to most climates. The medlar is a lesser-known fruit tree that we encourage you to seek out; the size and shape of its leaf is reminiscent of a magnolia. Its unusual-looking fruit must ripen on the tree until it is very soft, so that makes the fruit difficult for grocery stores to carry. The medlar is a relative of the rose and its fruit will remind you of apple butter, soft with flavors of cinnamon.

Fig and pomegranate trees are among the more versatile edibles that you can grow in your front yard. Because they both have somewhat irregular branch structure, they tend not to make good focal points. However, the wide leaves of the fig are beautiful, lush additions to any style of garden,



LEFT: Pomegranate fruit

ripen through the summer and fall.

RIGHT: Broad fig leaves add seasonal color to the garden. This bright yellow foliage is a highlight of autumn.

and can serve to anchor a planting bed alongside smaller plants with less presence. While a fig tree is obviously at home as part of a Mediterranean-style garden, its bare winter branches are sculptural and can help imbue a garden with a modern sensibility. Pomegranate trees are another versatile, deciduous plant. It can be pruned into a tree or multibranched shrub and can be mixed into almost any garden style. Because its red flowers and fruit are so long-lasting, you can count on it to add pops of vibrancy to your garden or to tie in to a color theme across your landscape.

## Step Four: Add Plants for Beauty and Production

After your anchor plants are placed, the next step is to fill in with other mid-height plants that produce fruit and vegetables, can be brought inside as cut flowers, and will help ensure the beauty of your garden throughout the year. These plants can include perennial edible and ornamental shrubs, pollinator-attracting flowers, and plants that provide year-round interest with winter blooms and interesting foliage. You can also fill in with annual edible plants and edible flowers.

### Perennial Edibles

Best known as a delicious pie ingredient, rhubarb is a delight in the garden. This perennial's large lush leaves complement any design style and contrast nicely with finer leaves in a mixed planting bed. The broad leaves also serve as a great foil to other more delicate flowers and foliage in a decorative floral arrangement. Rhubarb is a low-growing to medium-height plant, reaching about eighteen to thirty inches tall. Because it can tolerate both partial shade and sunnier spots, it can be repeated throughout the landscape to establish balance at the medium-height planting level. Keep in mind that the rhubarb's stalks are edible, but not its beautiful leaves, which are toxic and shouldn't be eaten.



Lush rhubarb leaf alongside contrasting textures of the golden variegated sweet flag grass and the deep-hued plectranthus 'Mona Lavender'.

The vertical leaves and stems of the artichoke plant, another perennial, have an architectural quality that can be used to great effect in defining a front-garden space. A relative of the common thistle, the plant has tough



Globe artichoke in the garden.

silver foliage accented by large, purple, thistlelike blooms. Their upright growth habit make them great choices to tuck into larger planting beds mixed with silvertoned flowers like 'Kellerei' yarrow or planted on hillsides, mixed in with Mediterranean tree plantings like olives, citrus, figs, and pomegranate. Artichokes come in both green and purple varieties; try a more unusual variety like 'Violetta di Chioggia' or purple 'Romanesco'.

Artichokes can help imbue a sense of whimsy in a cottage garden with their unexpected purple color. The plants are perennial but they slow down their production after a couple of years when grown in milder climates; when you see your plant sending up a new offshoot, that is a good time to retire the old plant and continue with the newer, younger shoot. In colder climates, you can grow

them as annuals because they will die in the winter; this usually coincides with the production of new offshoots that you can separate and plant again.

Lemongrass is another discreet edible, as many folks do not expect to see an

edible grass in the garden. A perennial evergreen in warmer climates, this important ingredient for Thai and Vietnamese cooking makes a lovely backdrop for other deciduous plantings. Lemongrass can also be planted as an annual in colder regions. Plant lemongrass along a pathway so you can enjoy the lemon scent of its fragrant stalks as you walk by.

### Annual Vegetables and Edible Flowers

In addition to perennial plants, you can add annual vegetables and edible flowers to your borders or larger mixed-planting beds. There are a lot of annual edibles that will grow well if you dot them in as accents among existing perennials. One way to think about it is that wherever you might plant annual ornamental color such as primroses, zinnias, and impatiens, you can use an annual edible for color instead. This approach is well suited for a cottage or traditional-style garden that includes annual plant accents.



LEFT: The white- and purple-striped 'Rosa Bianca' eggplant is a compact and stunning addition to any planting bed. RIGHT: Allium flowers from onions, shallots, or chives are a whimsical addition to an integrated planting.



## Planting Inspiration

Sometimes a vignette in your garden can provide inspiration for new ways to use color and texture in an arrangement. In our own garden, pictured at right, we noticed the simple beauty in the complementary purple-green colors and heartshaped leaves of purple basil, lavender-colored succulents, and vibrant green herbs growing together and combined them in a centerpiece. To finish the arrangement, we added in a few matching viola blooms to tie it all together. Get inspired by your own garden and cut flowers and foliage from it that create the same effect. Select an appropriately sized vessel and add your chosen stems, creating layers of color and texture.



For the front yard, it's best to choose annual edibles that are compact and colorful. Incorporate plants that are tidy to begin with and don't take a lot of work to keep that way. Some of the easiest, best-looking annual vegetables to

add to a front yard's ornamental border are chile peppers, sweet bell peppers, and eggplant. Celery, parsley, basil, lovage, and cilantro add full, green foliage to any mixed planting bed and can be planted en masse as an edging to a planting border. Similarly, purple basil and brightly hued violas add color. Leeks, onions, and scallions provide vertical aesthetic and contrast in texture when planted amid flowers and other border bedding. Planted in larger groups or geometric color blocks, all of these different annual edibles can contribute to a more stylized, modern landscape.

## **Step Five: Fill It Out with Groundcovers and Low-Growing Plants**

Now that you have planted perennial trees and shrubs for structure and height, and other perennial and annual edibles and ornamentals for midlevel greenery and to attract beneficial insects and pollinators, it is time to complete your front yard planting beds using low-growing and groundcover plants.

One of the easiest ways to increase the productivity of your front yard is to incorporate low-growing perennial herbs into your existing ornamental planting beds. Perennial herbs are very reliable; with pruning, you can count on them to look a certain way throughout the year. They may thin out or die back during a cold winter, but they will pop right back up once spring arrives. When planting herbs in a mixed-border bed, place upright herb varieties such as culinary and 'Tricolor' sage, chives, tarragon, summer and winter savories, dwarf varieties of lavender and rosemary, and German chamomile in mass plantings or mixed in among the perennial flowers in the bed. Then, use groundcover and small mounding types such as Greek oregano or the variegated 'White Anniversary' oregano on the



Purple culinary and golden sage, combined with the daisylike flowers and bright foliage of the medicinal herb golden feverfew, are a wonderful way to complete an integrated ornamental, edible planting.

## Apply Design Principles

outside edges of beds. Variegated lemon or silver thyme are good lower-growing additions to a fullsun bed; shade-tolerant Roman chamomile, sweet woodruff, and 'Spicy Orange' thyme make great low-growing plantings because they can be used in both sun and shade to visually link parts of your garden with different light exposures. For a shady corner planted with edible and ornamental shade shrubs, the perennial edible flower *Viola odorata* is a low-growing, fragrant addition whose pretty purple flowers can be candied and used on cakes and desserts.

Now that you've gone through the five steps of laying out your front yard garden, be sure to consider and apply the four overall design principles as well: balance, arrangement, year-round beauty and production, and unified style. There are a few aspects of these principles that are particularly applicable to the front yard edible garden.

In the front yard where design decisions can take precedence over food production, whether or not an edible plant helps establish balance can be a determining factor in how to incorporate it into your overall design. Color is a key tool here, and remember, it is not just about flowers. Edible plants provide color with both their fruit and their foliage; place them throughout your front garden in support of your overall color scheme.

### here are some perennial edibles, by color:

vaRiEgaTED: variegated citrus (try lemon, kumquat, or calamondin) • ‘Panache’ fig • variegated scented geraniums • variegated Chilean guava • ginger mint • pineapple mint • variegated ‘White Anniversary’ oregano • golden sage • ‘La Crema’ sage • ‘Tricolor’ sage • ‘Silver Posie’ thyme • variegated lemon thyme



LEFT TO Right: Variegated Chilean guava, ‘Silver Posie’ thyme, ‘Pink Lemonade’ lemon.

ChaRTREuSE: creeping golden marjoram • golden crinkled oregano • golden feverfew • lemon verbena • lime thyme • persimmon



LEFT TO Right: Lime thyme

and creeping golden marjoram with perennial Johnny jump-up violas; golden feverfew; lime thyme.

SiLvER: artichoke • cardoon • lavender • ‘Zaatar’ marjoram • olive • pineapple

guava • ‘Berggarten’ sage • culinary sage • silver thyme

RED: pomegranate • ‘Pineapple’ sage • red-veined sorrel • alpine strawberries



LEFT TO Right: 'Berggarten' sage, cardoon, pomegranate, and red-veined sorrel, also known as 'bloody dock'.

EvERgREEN: culinary sweet bay • blueberries • Chilean guava • huckleberries • rosemary • sorrel



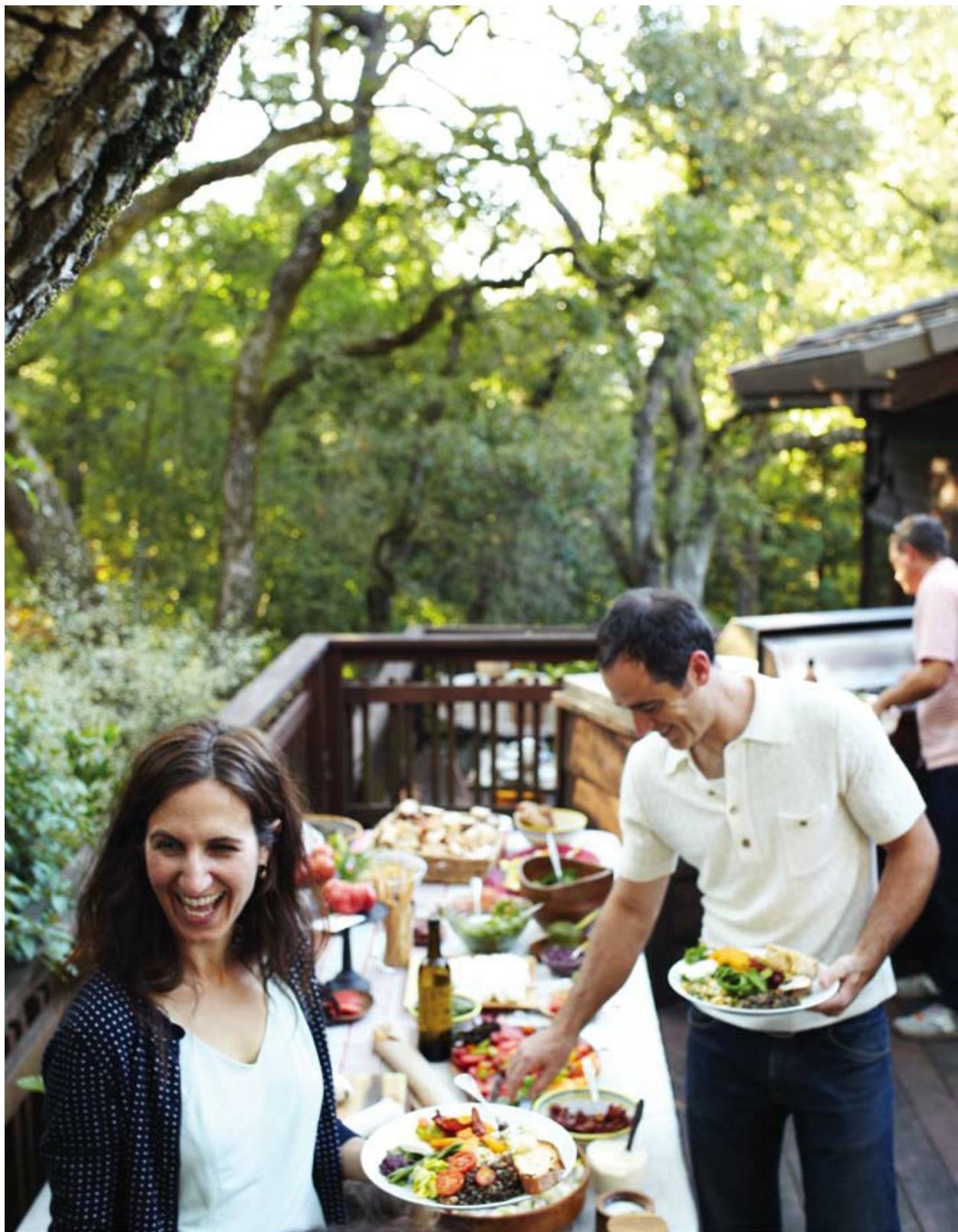
LEFT: 'Tuscan Blue' rosemary.

Right: Huckleberries.

Keep arrangement in mind as you lay out your plants, too. In a space like the front yard that is often seen from a distance, planting in asymmetrical groupings or in mass plantings makes a higher visual impact. It is especially easy to arrange your structural plantings using an asymmetrical triangle shape as your framework in the front yard, because a front yard focal-point fruit tree

already takes care of one of the triangle corners. Once you have placed it, pick two smaller fruit trees or evergreen shrubs to anchor the other corners of the triangle for the start of a balanced layout.

How often you utilize your front yard is a determining factor in plant selection for year-round beauty and food production. If you spend less time in the front yard than the back, put edibles in front that you use less often and reserve your favorite frequent producers for the backyard. If you tend to spend more time on your front porch in late summer and early fall, include flowers that bloom during the seasons you'll be in these locations. Similarly, white flowers glow in the twilight hours, so if you like to sit out front in the evening, include white blooms in the surrounding planting beds. Thinking about how you live in your garden and making plant selections accordingly will help create a space that you will enjoy that much more.



**Four**

## The Beautiful Edible Backyard

The backyard is truly your own space—it is where you share meals, relax, play, and entertain your friends. Unlike the front yard, the backyard is where you invite people to spend time with you. It is a special, personal area where you have the opportunity to design a space that truly reflects who you are.

Creating a backyard garden is ideally about creating an extension of your home's living space—this “room” is just living, breathing, and outdoors. Like any other room, it is important to consider who is using this space and how. So, after assessing the growing conditions, including soil, food safety, water, and light, start asking questions. First of all, you want to make sure you enjoy spending time in your garden. What do you like to do when you are by yourself or with family? How do you use the space when you invite friends

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over? Thinking through the activities, social and otherwise, that take place in the space is an important part of your planning process.

For most people, the backyard is where you have a bit more space to grow the foods you love to eat—tomatoes, summer squash, peppers, basil, and beans, to name a few. Because people generally spend more time in their backyard than they do in the front, it is also a more suitable place to grow annual edibles that require higher maintenance.

Somehow, though, many people relegate their vegetable gardens to the periphery of their backyard, away from the areas where they gather and entertain.

How many vegetable gardens have you seen that are at the back of someone's yard, tucked away, and out of sight? Instead, the most exciting way to approach the design of a backyard is to create a space where you are in a close relationship with the food you're eating and sharing with others, and whose beauty inspires and encourages interaction.

The reason most vegetable gardens seem like separate, less-attractive spaces in a landscape is that they are relegated to raised beds edged with wood, placed without much attention to the yard's overall design, and planted solely with annual vegetables. In this chapter, we're going to demonstrate how to include your dedicated annual-vegetable beds as an element of a well-designed, balanced overall landscape. We'll do this by discussing a dedicated vegetable garden space alongside considerations for your larger backyard, as we go through the step-by-step planning process introduced in chapter two. We'll then show you how to apply the design



This integrated ornamental, edible planting bed includes arugula, 'Osaka Purple' mustard, and chives planted among artichoke, rosemary, ornamental oregano 'Kent Beauty', 'Fred Ives' graptoveria, and *Euphorbia rigida*.

principles from chapter one to both your dedicated annual-vegetable planting

beds and your entire backyard landscape. As you approach your own backyard, following these steps will guide you in creating a garden that meets your needs for growing food and that is beautiful enough to share with your family and friends.

## Step One: Arrange Permanent Elements

Where to situate permanent elements such as planting beds, patios and sitting areas, pathways, fencing, lawn, and other items is the first decision you will be making as you design your back garden. Keep in mind that you are *living* in this space. Eating among the beautiful fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers you've grown is the real joy of the beautiful edible garden. Your decisions about the permanent elements of your overall backyard landscape should be made hand in hand with decisions about where it makes most sense to grow food.

### Planting Beds

Your main options for growing annual vegetables are either creating a dedicated vegetable bed that is a part of your garden's overall design or integrating edibles into your ornamental planting beds. Whichever approach you take, figuring out a way to put your sunniest spots to use is one of the keys to creating a successful beautiful edible garden. It is also convenient to dedicate some planting space near your back door for an herb and salad garden, because these are the edibles you are likely to harvest and eat daily.

#### DeDicateD annual-Vegetable beDs

First and foremost, you need to identify the sunniest flat spot in your garden and place your annual-vegetable planting beds there. Because tomatoes, sweet peppers, eggplant, and so many of our other favorite vegetables need a minimum of six to ten hours of sun to grow and ripen (see page 42),



Family dining is the focal point of this backyard garden, with its relaxed take on urban modern style. Although compact, the space has all the elements of a beautiful edible garden: a dedicated annual-vegetable planting bed with an apple tree, stylish communal dining, and lush surrounding plantings of pollinator-attracting flowers and mixed ornamentals and edibles. Burgundy loropetalum, 'Crimson Curls' heuchera, cordyline, and clustered plantings of red lettuces and violas link the different types of planting areas together. Further repetition of low-growing silver groundcovers and wooden hardscaping materials make this an overall balanced landscape.



Make the dedicated annual-vegetable garden a balanced part of your larger backyard design by repeating the same hardscaping material. If your garden is terraced with stone-lined beds, then your vegetable garden should be, too.

there is not a lot of wiggle room if you want to have a successful harvest. At least some of the sunniest space in your backyard must be allotted to vegetables that need full sun.

Use the same hardscaping materials found in the larger landscape to build your annual-vegetable planting beds. This will create a balanced and unified feel in the garden. There are some other, more practical considerations to take into account when creating vegetable beds. If space allows, having at least three dedicated vegetable planting beds allows for easy crop rotation (see chapter six for more information) and is aesthetically pleasing. Bed width for annual-vegetable plantings should be no more than three feet. Think of this in terms of a comfortable arm's reach: standing or crouching at the edge of the vegetable planting bed, you need to be able to reach the plants to place, care for, and harvest them without stepping into the beds and compacting your beautifully prepared soil. The length of the bed should be determined by what's appropriate for your space.

It also makes sense to incorporate places to sit and set down your harvest basket. A built-in bench in between beds or a nice stone with a flat surface both make for an easy place to rest and enjoy your garden.

If you do not have enough space to dedicate *all* of your sunniest spots to annual-vegetable planting beds—or if you have a permanent, difficult-to-move feature in the sunniest parts of your garden, like a patio, large tree, or well-established ornamental plant



ing bed—there are plenty of ways to still create a backyard space that is beautiful and productive. If you have a patio in the sunniest area, you can place your annual vegetables in containers (see chapter five for creating edible gardens in containers). If you've got an existing ornamental bed in the sunniest spot or have no other space in which to grow flowers and shrubbery,

you can integrate edibles into those plantings; we'll cover how to do this later in the chapter.

#### Herb beds

Fresh herbs will change the way you eat. They are the edible garden's big bang for your buck. These plants have short "fresh" shelf lives, so what's offered in a grocery store is often not only expensive but also less flavorful. Many culinary herbs are perennial and pay back their initial investment after only one or two harvests. Plus, you can have a larger range of fresh herbs on hand if you grow them yourself.

To really integrate herbs into your life, the ones you cook with everyday should be easily accessible at a moment's notice. If you're following a recipe that calls for a specific herb, it makes all the difference to be able to

Herbs include variegated 'White Anniversary' oregano, purple culinary sage, 'Silver Posie' thyme, 'Fern Leaf' dill, and edible viola flowers.



simply step outside your door and pick what you need rather than having to walk halfway across the garden. You'll find that, because the herbs are so convenient, you can start cooking more intuitively—tasting the dish as you're preparing it and deciding what to add next. Therefore, the best place to grow culinary herbs is right outside your kitchen door. If you can't create a "kitchen door" herb garden, choose a planting bed as close to the house as possible and designate it as your permanent herb garden. If you don't have a planting bed that is easily accessible from your kitchen, create one by using a clay container or building a raised wooden planter.

Rosemary, oregano, thyme, and sage are classics, but this is your opportunity to have at your fingertips all the specialty herbs you've seen in your cookbooks and wished you had in your garden. Marjoram is a great example

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Opposite: Enjoy herbs right outside your kitchen door! This dedicated herb garden is constructed with the same stones that line the rest of the yard's planting beds. The bed is built up for vertical interest and ease of harvest. It is planted with perennial and evergreen herbs that serve as anchors, while annual herbs such as basil and cilantro come and go with the seasons. Plant height and color are used to achieve a varied, attractive look; edible violas plus pollinator-attracting alyssum and sea thrift are used as additional color and accents.





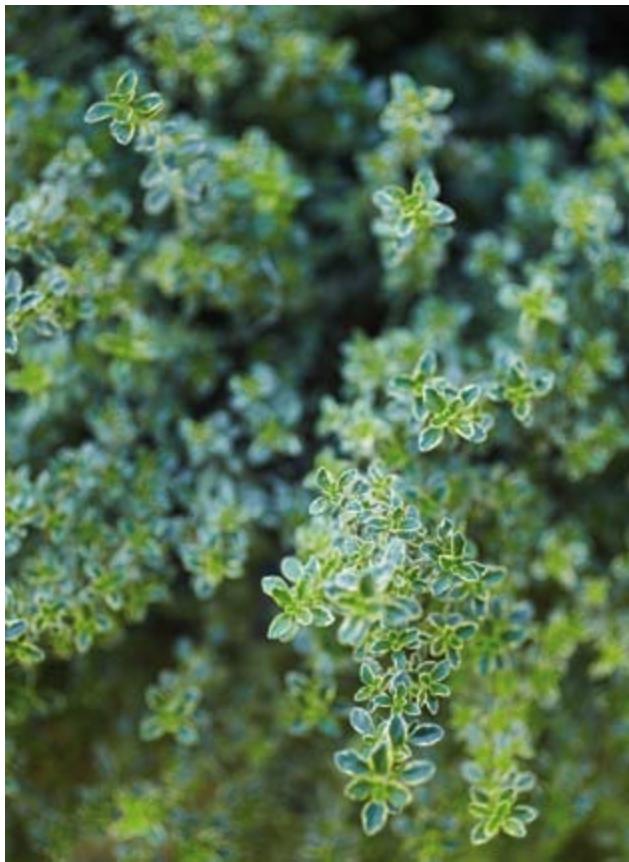
French and English thyme, 'Tricolor' sage, garlic chives, Greek oregano, and white- and purple-flowered pollinator-attracting alyssum cascade over the edges of this dedicated herb container.

a bit milder than oregano (although from the same family), it is an herb often used in traditional French and California cuisines. Chervil, cutting celery, sorrel, and salad burnet are other herbs that have short shelf lives and so are not usually found at a grocery store. They are easy to grow and wonderful additions to any herb salad. Plant different varieties of herbs, like regular and garlic chives, and experiment! You will come to know which ones you prefer in your favorite dishes.

As with any other planting, keep design principles in mind as you plant your dedicated herb garden. Plant your herbs close together to deter weeds and for a full look. Within your herb planting, repeat and contrast textures: the soft, fuzzy leaves of culinary sage look amazing next to spiky chives and the small, glossy round leaves of variegated lemon thyme. Add

flowers for splashes of color and to tie in with the key colors or foliage textures of your larger landscape. Pay attention to plant selection, choosing varieties whose color and height fit in well with your planting. Like many plants, the edible and medicinal flowers agastache, echinacea, and lavender have smaller- and larger-sized varieties—look for smaller plants that grow in the twelve- to eighteen-inch range for an herb garden bed.

Place taller herbs, like rosemary, lemongrass, and lovage, in the back of the bed or, if planting



Variegated lemon thyme.

in a container that is accessible from all sides, in the center of the planting. Next place your medium-height herbs, keeping plant color, texture, and leaf shape in mind. Herbs that are medium height, meaning twelve to eighteen inches tall, include parsley, basil, lovage, sage, and epazote, among many others. Group like colors and textures together for a more monochromatic, modern look, or plant herbs with like colors asymmetrically across the planting bed. Then fill out your herb bed with low-growing and groundcover herbs that will spill over the sides, including low-growing varieties of thyme,

chamomile, and oregano.

## Herb Wreath



When the weather turns chilly, head indoors for some cozy kitchen projects. Herb wreaths make a lovely hostess or holiday gift, are a fun project to do with children, and can be a snazzy addition to your own kitchen décor. As a bonus, the dried herbs can be utilized in your cooking. To make this wreath, start by cutting long sections of woody rosemary branches to build the frame for the wreath. Form them into a circle and bind the sections together using baker's twine or your favorite natural gardening twine. Next, snip several stems of sage, chives, thyme, marjoram, lavender, and any other herbs you have. If you have children, they can help you gather these herbs and

arrange them into small bunches. Tie the small bunches of herbs together and secure them to the rosemary frame with twine. Continue in this fashion until you have completed the wreath, and then hang and dry it for your own

culinary preparations, or give it to a friend.



#### Waist-High salad beds

If you eat salads several times a week your back will thank you if you plant your lettuces and other leafy greens in a waist-high planting bed that is at least two and a half to three feet high. Although lettuces and braising greens can be grown in in-ground planting beds, it will be easier to care for them if they are planted at a height at which you do not have to bend down to do regular succession plantings and daily harvesting.

As with herbs, placing your waist-high lettuce bed near your kitchen door will be more convenient. If you can include this in your initial placement of permanent garden elements, you'll find that it is truly one of the garden's great luxuries.

If space is limited, you can combine herb and salad plantings in the most

accessible planting bed; remember that salad greens are annual plants and will need to have the soil they are grown in amended and turned periodically.



For ease of harvest, place your salad and other leafy greens in a waist-high planting bed. Convert an existing ornamental planting bed into a salad garden by swapping out ornamental shrubs at the rear of the bed for evergreen herbs or blueberries and perennial flowers that can act as anchors for the space, creating balance and ensuring year-round beauty in this part of the garden.

Many culinary herbs are perennials, so they should be grouped together or planted near the edges of the bed. This way you will not disturb their roots as you prepare the soil for annual salad green plantings.

### [Patios, Pathways, and Places to Gather](#)

During summer's long, warm days you'll want an inviting patio for al fresco gatherings with family and friends. Consider the space that you'll need to share family meals, and how that space will be integrated into the backyard. There are a few different ways to approach situating a patio in the garden. You can design a patio with a more open perspective and an amazing view of your garden, or you can set up a space that feels like a cozy oasis—maybe around a firepit or nestled up against a small wall. Outdoor cooking and dining a few steps from your back door, with easy access to the kitchen,

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## Some Vegetables Deserve Their own Beds: Garlic and Potatoes

If space allows, find small areas to create separate planting beds for garlic and potatoes. These two vegetables have unusual growth habits and needs that make them difficult to incorporate with other plantings, but the different varieties and flavors you can produce make the effort worthwhile.

garlic: A garlic bed is a beautiful thing, especially for the garlic enthusiast. Heirloom garlics are rarely sold outside of farmers' markets due to their short shelf life, especially when compared to their cousin, the commonly available white garlic. There is such an enormous range of amazing purple, red, and striped garlic available that you'll be astounded at the variety of flavors you can experience. You'll love incorporating varieties such as 'Thai Fire', 'Chesnok Red', 'Spanish Roja', and 'Italian Purple' into your cooking.

A garlic bed can be tucked into a sunny location in the garden or given a small full-sun nook. Garlic is planted in the fall and harvested in early summer. It cures in-ground the last few weeks before it is harvested, so the planting bed's water must be turned off for three



weeks leading up to its early summer harvest. For this reason, it is optimal to give garlic its own bed, because your other edibles will not survive the early summer without water. When the garlic is being watered, you can take advantage of unused space by intercropping shallow-rooted salad greens with

your garlic. Plant the salad green transplants between the garlic as you plant the cloves. The garlic will not need the surface space until the spring, after you have harvested the salad greens. If you cannot create a dedicated garlic bed, you can still grow garlic with other plants; as long as the planting bed has good sun exposure and lots of loamy organic compost, your garlic will be happy to grow anywhere in your garden. Just be sure to give it some space, so that when you turn off the nearby sprinkler head in early summer, you will not be cutting the water supply to other edibles planted in the same area.

**pOtatoes:** Harvesting potatoes is akin to your own garden treasure hunt. A favorite for kids of all ages, growing potatoes is almost as fun as eating them. Potatoes are tubers, which means that they grow underground and need a lot of space. They are also susceptible to many of the same blights as tomatoes and other vegetables, so it is safest to give them their own planting bed to reduce exposure to blight. You will also find that because the seed for potatoes is the actual vegetable itself, once potatoes have been introduced to a bed, they typically never leave it. Miss just one small potato when you are harvesting and it will soon start growing again. This can be a lot of fun, but if you are rotating crops in your annual vegetable beds, one unharvested potato lingering in a bed could become a nuisance. Giving potatoes their own bed alleviates many of these concerns. They are heavy feeders and their beds must be amended often with lots of organic compost. If you have any sign of blight, stop growing potatoes in the bed and do not plant other vegetables affected by blight, like the aforementioned tomatoes, in the bed until the blight is eradicated, which can take up to seven years. If you don't have a planting bed to dedicate to potatoes, grow bags—which are fabric containers made out of special porous material—or other large plant containers are another way to give potatoes their own space.



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makes sense for many people. However, if you have a flat shaded area with a view a bit further away, place your dining area there and make it a special destination or focal point of your garden. Many people don't realize that they can situate their main seating area in the middle of their vegetable garden—this approach is a great way to create an outdoor room that feels alive and that inspires the next freshly harvested meal.

Choose or construct a level area in your garden to situate your gathering

space and provide shade from the sun. Many people resort to a patio umbrella for shade, but this is a wonderful opportunity for you to incorporate more edibles in your backyard by planting a broad-leaved fruit or nut tree, such as persimmon or walnut, or by building an arbor covered with deciduous edible vines such as kiwi, passion fruit, or grapes that will provide plenty of shade in summer and let in light in winter when they drop their leaves.





In addition to creating a pleasing overall ambience, you'll want to make sure that your gathering space is accessible and comfortable. Pathways should provide convenient access to the patio area and encourage you and your visitors to wander; your vegetable gardens in particular ought to connect easily to the larger backyard space.

### **Faraway Places in Your Backyard**

As you are considering the permanent elements of your backyard garden, you may wonder what to do with the parts of your garden that are far away or difficult to access on a daily or regular basis. There are many ways to put such faraway places to productive use: a fruit and nut tree orchard, an edible meadow, plantings of annual vegetables that need a lot of space, or a compost system.

#### **Fruit anD nut OrcHarDs**

Fruit and nut orchards are a wonderful way to utilize the rear portion of a back garden. If you have a large or faraway space that you do not want to fully landscape, start an orchard. A home orchard planted with the fruits you love can be a real pleasure. Moreover, because fruit and nut trees are low-maintenance edible plantings that usually come into harvest for just a few

weeks of the year, it makes sense to place them in parts of your garden that you don't visit as regularly. In fact, the tucked-away spot where lots of people place their raised annual-vegetable beds is often exactly where your fruit and nut trees should go.

#### eDible MeaDOWs

Edible plants can be integrated into a low-maintenance meadow-style planting. This is a great solution for a hillside, an open area, or any other expanse of land in the rear of your backyard where you may not want to create a garden and are not quite sure what to do. Meadows filled with edibles also make a great underplanting to home fruit- and nut-tree orchards. Some edible plants well suited to meadows include fall-blooming saffron bulbs, lemongrass, 'Breadseed' poppies, 'Fern Leaf' dill, crimson clover (not edible but a soil enhancer and pollinator-attractor), yarrow, amaranth, borage, nasturtium, sunflower, chives, and German chamomile. Sun-loving perennial edibles like artichokes, cardoon, Jerusalem artichoke, agastache, echinacea, and lavender also look great in a casual, low-maintenance area. The key to an attractive edible meadow that relates to your overall garden design is to keep the design principles in mind: repeat an evergreen herb or other anchor plant that you have used elsewhere in the garden, then fill in the remaining spaces with mixed grasses and mid-height flowers. This is a perfect place for wildflowers.

#### Vegetables tHat neeD space

The backyard is where you can grow sprawling, unruly vegetables, like winter squash, melon, and other vegetables that need a lot of space, like corn. You can grow these in your dedicated annual-vegetable beds or try to integrate them into your ornamental beds, but because they tend to get disorderly, a good place to put annual vegetables that need space is in faraway parts of the garden.

One of the garden's real joys for many families is growing your own jack-o'-lantern. But don't stop there—pumpkins are just one of many types of winter squash and there are a whole host of varieties to choose from. Try the warty 'Galeux d'Eysine'; 'Bright Red d'Etampes', better known as the Cinderella pumpkin; and many of the more unusual blue-green hued squashes like 'Queensland Blue'. Winter squash is a great planting for open, full-sun areas in the back of your garden, planted on a hillside, planted sporadically in a

perennial planting bed and left to wander through plantings, or even as an underplanting in a fruit-tree orchard. If you don't have space for a full squash patch, seek out smaller varieties. Winter squash doesn't work well in a highly visible part of your garden because it is hard to contain and tends to spread through barriers, plus it cures on the vine— meaning there is a period where you must leave the dead vines in the garden while the squash skins harden.

Similarly, long rows of corn are often more suited for a sunny space in the rear of your back garden. Of course, if you want corn for just one meal, you can work a few stalks into your dedicated annual-vegetable beds or as part of your mixed ornamental, edible planting beds. But if you







are growing corn for more than one meal, you must plant a fairly large amount of corn, so using a space in the rear of the backyard makes sense. Corn needs to be planted in blocks or rows so that plants can touch and pollinate each other in the summer breeze. If the summer is not particularly windy, you can help your corn get the pollination it needs by walking through the rows and shaking the plants' hands (or stalks) as you walk by. A tall stand of corn makes a beautiful backdrop for the rest of your summer garden, but if your garden does not contain an empty rear space and you still want to incorporate a large quantity of corn into your overall design, the corn rows or blocks can be placed in a more prominent area by planting a low edible hedge in front of the corn or defining the growing space with the same hardscaping materials as your other garden beds to provide structure.



A single bin compost system is easy to tuck away in the back of the garden. cOMpOst bins  
Distant parts of your garden are

good locations for your compost bin. Keep in mind that you'll need to access this area while carrying garden waste, so make sure that you can reach your compost bin easily with either a wheelbarrow or a bucket and that you have the space to turn your compost easily. If you are thinking of building your own compost bin, the same food safety considerations discussed in chapter two for hardscaping and container building materials apply to compost bins. (See page 176 for more information on compost and compost bins.)

## Step Two: Establish Focal Points

Many of your garden's permanent elements can and should be the focal points of your backyard. A brightly colored garden bench, an attractive communal dining area, and, of course, the vegetable garden are all ideal features to highlight as a focal point. As in the front yard, a large fruit tree that provides some winter interest, either with hanging fruit or attractive branch structure, makes a great centerpiece. Container plantings, winter-blooming plants, and other favorite, striking plants can all work as focal

points, too.

Ideally, you should situate a backyard focal point so that you can enjoy it from a comfortable outdoor seating spot in summer and from a window inside your house in winter. You can also create focal points by designing pathways that lead to a permanent element. In one of our favorite gardens, an old oak tree stands in the center while the rest of the garden revolves around it. A circular path directs you through the backyard, always maintaining a great view of this majestic tree. Placing focal points at a distance and not directly outside your back door can elongate the view and helps make a small backyard seem larger.





### Step Three: Position Anchor Plants

The key to a beautiful edible backyard that successfully integrates an annual vegetable garden with the aesthetic of the overall landscape is purposeful repetition of anchor elements to link the different types of spaces within the backyard. Evergreen plants and fruit trees are especially versatile because they can be repeated as anchors both in the larger backyard and in the beds immediately surrounding the dedicated annual-vegetable garden. Within the dedicated annual-vegetable planting beds, the same concepts discussed in chapter two apply, but because there are fewer evergreen plants whose scale is appropriate for the dedicated annual-vegetable garden, perennial herbs, hardscape, and trellising are used as an additional way to anchor the space.

## **Evergreen Trees and Shrubs**

The same evergreen edibles that are so useful in the front yard can be used throughout the backyard garden. However, if you've been dreaming of homegrown avocados or loquats, now's your chance. Both fruit trees grow large and can have an irregular look; so while they may not be best for front yards, they're a good evergreen planting for the more accommodating and relaxed backyard space. In colder climates, it can be difficult to find perennial edibles that will hold their leaves through the winter. Not to worry—because the backyard is usually a bit larger than the front yard, there is more room to use ornamental evergreen plants as anchors in your garden without worrying about sacrificing food-producing space.

## **Deciduous Fruit Trees**

Deciduous fruit and nut trees are great anchor plantings for the backyard and are also one of the easiest steps to take toward making your garden more edible. Select a range of fruit trees: they will provide a shady canopy during summer, seasonal interest with their changing foliage, and, of course their wonderful fruit. Whether you plant multiple trees along a staircase or fence, stagger them across an expansive landscape, or even place them in containers on a porch, fruit trees supply excellent visual punctuation across your garden.

If you only have room for one or two fruit trees in the backyard, the apricot tree is easily a top choice. It is one of the most graceful fruit trees and is great if you have a prominent backyard planting area that you want to highlight.

Apricot is also one of the first to bloom and offers up prolific amounts of sweet fruit that is far superior to its grocery store counterparts. Because they are such early bloomers, it is a good idea to plant apricots



in an area protected from winter winds or choose mid- to lateblooming varieties, like 'Harglow', to hedge your bets that an early spring storm might blow off all of the tree's blossoms—and thus its future fruit.

If your backyard has space for more fruit trees, it is a great opportunity to plant unusual fruit trees like mulberry and out-of-theordinary varieties of better-known fruit trees, such as 'Panache' figs, with their sweet citrus-tinged rosy interior and their highly decorative yellow-and-green striped skin. Seek out fruits that are hard to find in stores but can be easily grown in the home orchard, like quince. This is a strikingly attractive tree that is fragrant and whose fruits make wonderful jams. Look for

Anchor your annual-vegetable garden with fruit trees and perennial herbs. In this garden an 'Anna' apple anchors the right rear corner; 'Silver Posie' and English thyme cascade over stone bed walls.



‘Panache’ fig fruit.

disease- and blight-resistant varieties of fruit trees, like ‘Warren’ pears, if blights are a problem where you live. Also keep in mind that even if considered self-fertile, most fruit trees will produce better in pairs (or more). Check the pollination needs of a particular tree before you purchase it.

In addition to apricot trees, pomegranate or citrus trees are also perfectly suited to the home garden and may be integrated as anchors into your backyard space. Similarly, the almond should not be overlooked as a backyard tree in warmer climates. The tree has a lovely shape and its nuts are considered a true culinary delight, especially when eaten “green.” The almond does have specific pollination needs, so if your garden only has space for one almond tree, be sure to seek out self-fertile varieties.



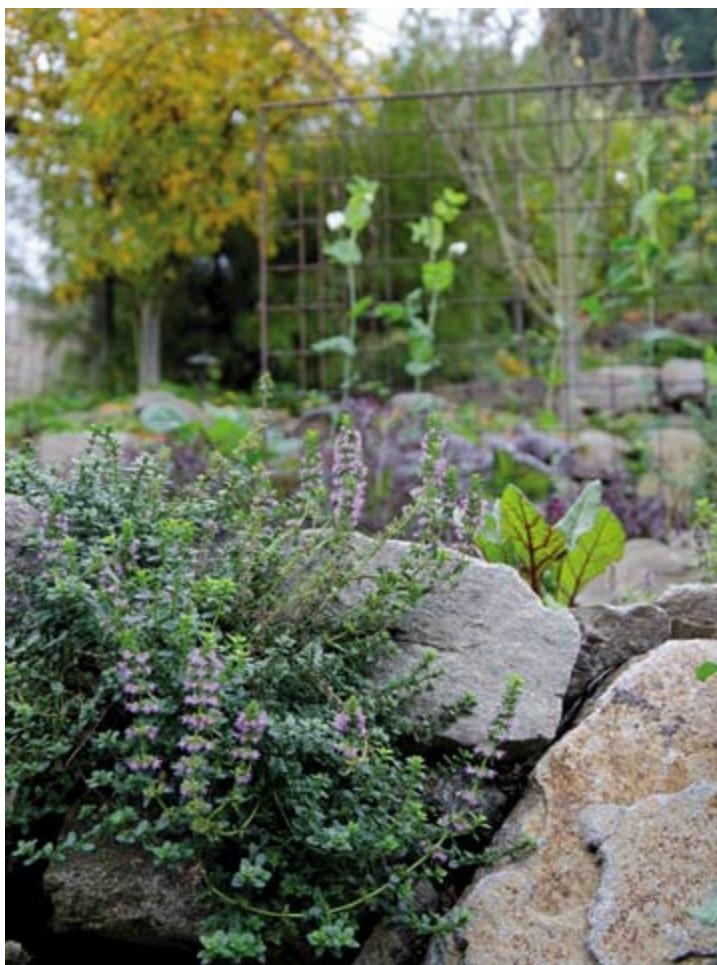
Spring blossoms and

summer fruit make pears a favorite fruit tree for the garden.

### Trellising

Trellising is a versatile anchor that can be used in both your dedicated annual-vegetable bed and your integrated edible-ornamental planting beds. If your only sunny spot for annual vegetables is in an existing planting bed that

is occupied with a tree or ornamental shrubs that you do not want to part with, trellising is helpful in incorporating your annual edibles into this space.





leFt: Annual edibles come and go, but garden trellises and perennial herbs can provide structure and beauty throughout the growing season. Metal garden trellises and English thyme anchor this dedicated vegetable garden during the winter months.

rigHt: In the summer, Romano green beans grow quickly to cover garden trellising.

To start, identify the spaces in the existing ornamental bed that receive full sun and are most easily accessible. This is where your support trellis for sun-loving vegetables should be placed. Choose sturdy, attractive support structures or trellises on which to grow larger, vining vegetables. Repeating the material and color of the trellises with other existing hardscape elements will give the bed a cohesive, balanced look that ties in with the rest of the landscape. Choose one type of trellis—that is, a trellis made in a certain design style and material—and repeat it. Remember to apply the principle of asymmetry and, while maintaining a consistent trellis type, pick out a few different sizes and shapes. This will allow you to train different kinds of vegetables and will also help create visual interest. Keep the total number of trellises to an odd number for a more dynamic look, and position them in a staggered pattern rather than a straight line. Place the trellises so that the visual impact of their material and height are balanced across the bed. Once they are placed, these trellises become anchors in the planting bed. They can

stay in these spots all year, providing year-round interest and structure as you switch out your vegetables seasonally.

## **Step Four: Add Plants for Beauty and Production**

Once you've arranged your permanent elements, established focal points, and chosen your anchors, the next step is to use plants to add beauty and production value to both your overall backyard space and your dedicated vegetable garden.

### **Perennial Flowers and Edibles**

Many of the concepts that we discussed in chapter three relating to adding perennial edibles and pollinator-attracting flowers and herbs to front yard ornamental planting beds also apply to your overall backyard landscape. Your backyard planting beds should include flowering perennials for cutting, year-round interest, and attracting beneficial insects (see page 62). Use plants that have a variety of bloom and harvest seasons so that there is always something beautiful happening in your garden (see page 16).

You may find that some of the larger and less-structured perennial edibles you love to eat are great additions to your backyard. Cardoon is a close relative of the artichoke, grown for its edible leaf stalks instead of



‘Red Velvet’ yarrow and euphorbia are beautiful additions to the garden and as cut flowers in your home. Because they attract beneficial insects and pollinators, they help your edible plants produce more fruits and vegetables.

its fruit; it grows to an unruly four to six feet tall, though, so is usually better suited to backyard spaces where it has room to shine. Similarly, cane berries such as raspberries, blackberries, and boysenberries are not well suited for a more structured front yard but are a charming addition to your backyard, especially if trellised up a fence.

Currants, gooseberries, and elderberries produce delicious fruit and are easy plants to grow at home. Their dramatic berry clusters can be appreciated for their ornamental qualities as much as for their delicious fruit. The graceful fountain form of currant branches tempt you to highlight the plant in your garden as a focal point, ideally with an evergreen planting directly behind it to provide coverage during winter months. Currants grow quite large and can be full and rangy. Depending on the style of garden you are



Harvest red raspberries, blackberries, gooseberries, and red and white currants from your garden.



developing, they might be more suitable placed toward the rear of a mixed garden planting bed or in a naturalistic woodland planting.

Gooseberries need to be placed thoughtfully because they often have thorns and need pruning to keep their shape, but they do make a lovely, looser hedge. Elderberry can be grown in shrub or tree form, so it's versatile enough to fill in among a range of plantings. If your garden has the space, consider using these unusual berry plants as supporting players in your backyard planting arrangement.

For a dramatic, tall planting at the rear of your backyard border beds, beautiful, frilly, and bright green and purple asparagus make a great backdrop for ornamental plantings. They work especially well with cottage-style borders where tall-spired blooms of plants like delphinium and veronica can be highlighted against the green asparagus foliage. Because asparagus is only harvested for four to six weeks of the year, it works well as a backdrop, even

when planted in a less-accessible location. The flavor of just-harvested spring asparagus is one of the true gifts of the garden. Asparagus loses its freshness and flavor by the hour once it's harvested—so you can imagine how much is lost after sitting in a grocery store for several days. If you like asparagus, you will *love* it freshly harvested from your garden. It is an investment of space and time, but the results are impressive. Depending on the age of the crowns you plant, you may have to wait up to three years to have a full harvest. But the wait is worth it—an asparagus bed can produce for more than twenty years.

### Perennial and Annual Edibles in an Existing Ornamental Bed

One way to make existing ornamental planting beds in your backyard landscape more productive is to add perennial and annual edibles. Take a look at the existing planting beds in your backyard and decide which plants need to stay, like a tree, and which plants can be taken out or moved—for example, any nonedible shrubs. If there is a tree in the bed, add shadetolerant, perennial edibles like rhubarb, blueberries, or huckleberries for the shadier spots. In the sunnier spaces, place some annual edibles with their trellises (see page 130). Then fill out your remaining planting areas with perennial flowers and annual edibles that do not need to be supported by trellising.

Peppers, eggplant, colorful chard, and purple and green cabbage make especially good additions to an existing ornamental bed. They also help transition your garden into more ornamental areas when planted in the role of traditional “annual color” along the length of a bed. Areas below a trellis and larger perennial plants can be planted with large groupings of annual edibles in strong colors that tie in to the existing ornamental planting. In the summer, blocks of purple basil can be used to provide contrast to green foliage in the mixed bed and also to tie in with other red- and burgundy-colored ornamental plantings. In the fall and winter, plant blocks of purple braising greens like purple choi and Russian kale. Onions, leeks, and shallots can be dotted in the rear of the planting or throughout the planting, because they require little space, add a bit of unobtrusive vertical interest, have a long growing period, and do not need daily harvesting.



Add edibles to your existing ornamental planting beds. Garden trellises and perennial shrub and herb plantings are anchors in this integrated garden. Used to support annual vegetables, the trellises are placed in full-sun growing conditions and in easily accessible locations. The trellises are rarely empty—they support snap peas and blue-podded peas in spring and fall. In summer, tomatoes are grown on the trellises: a determinant variety on the shorter one, and larger beefsteak and vining cherry tomatoes on the other two. The trellises are underplanted with strawberries and groundcover herbs, repeating the same edible groundcovers used throughout the bed. This repetition of plant material and purposeful placement of vertical structures creates a balanced look in this garden.





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Edible Flowers

Edible flowers are another great way to increase the beauty and productivity of the planting beds throughout your backyard. A number of plants are grown for their edible flowers, such as nasturtium, violas, and calendula, but did you



know that many vegetable and herb flowers are also good to eat? Summer squash blossoms are, of course, the most well known, but here are a few more ideas for how to eat the flowers growing in your garden:

agastache, Violas, scented geranium, nasturtium, calendula, lavender, orange, and rose: Use the petals of these edible flowers as cake decoration, ravioli

fillings, or sprinkled over salads.

Kale, Mustard, and collard greens: Add the flower buds to stir-fries or braised greens, or cook by themselves with some olive oil and garlic. arugula: Arugula flowers have a sweet flavor tinged with the pepper quality of the arugula leaves and make a delicious salad ingredient.

Winter squash: The flowers can be used just like summer squash blossoms. More delicate and often not available at grocery stores, winter squash flowers are equally delicious.

Herbs such as chive, sage, basil, rosemary, thyme, savory, and so many

more: They all have beautiful and tasty flowers that can be used in the kitchen. Bright blue rosemary blooms add a fun, spicy kick to winter salads.

Top row, left to right: 'Apricot Nectar' agastache, borage, calendula. Middle row, left to right: Scented geranium, kale flowers, flowering arugula.

Bottom row, left to right: A summer squash blossom, chive flowers, flowering culinary sage.

## Dedicated Annual-Vegetable Beds

You've already laid a structural foundation by repeating the textures, shapes, and colors from the rest of your backyard landscape in and around your dedicated annual-vegetable bed. Because the structure of your edible garden has been established it will be beautiful and you can choose to grow whatever annual vegetables you want. So, now is the time to ask . . . *what do you want to eat?*

Make a list. If there are multiple people in your home—make it a group effort! What do you like to eat most or wish you ate more of? Are there vegetables and fruits that are hard to find at the grocery store, are a family favorite, or are just too expensive if you buy them on a regular basis? Do you have a favorite that you grew up eating from your grandparents' garden? Or something that looks exciting and you've never tried before? Whatever your motivation, write down the list of the foods you want to grow, plant some of them, and start living in your garden!



Enjoy your harvest, from garden to table. This colorful and spicy watermelon radish adds a punch to salads or can be eaten alone with salt.



Add flowers and herbs to unused spaces in your dedicated annual-vegetable bed. Here, echinacea and 'Tricolor' sage are planted alongside cherry tomatoes.

## Step Five: Fill It Out with Groundcovers and Low-

## Growing Plants

The final step in planning your backyard garden is deciding the types of groundcovers and low-growing plants you will use to fill in bare spaces under and between plants and hardscaping. Plants that cascade over garden walls throughout your backyard landscape should be repeated on the edges of your dedicated annual-vegetable beds because they will help visually link the various parts of your backyard together. As mentioned in chapter two, strawberries, low-bush blueberries, oregano, creeping golden marjoram, thyme, nasturtium, and sage are great for this purpose.





Alpine strawberries are always a good choice for more stylized borders because they do not send out messy runners. These white alpine strawberries, called ‘White Delight’, work with the white and blue color scheme of this garden and have the added benefit of fooling birds who don’t recognize them as ripe fruit. Here they are planted as an edible groundcover to fill out a planting bed of hydrangea, euonymus, and the blue-flowered brunnera.

No space should go unused in your backyard. If you have areas in your planting beds where you can underplant existing ornamental or edible shrubs, consider adding a spreading edible groundcover, like strawberries or chamomile. Filling in these low-growing spaces will give your garden a full and lush look.

## **Pets and Growing Food**

Dogs, cats, chickens, and rabbits—your pets should all have a space where they can interact with you and your family, as well as a space of their own. Dog and cat excrement can contain harmful pathogens, so taking the precautions discussed in chapter two and making commonsense decisions regarding where to plant edibles will keep your food safe from possible exposure. For example, if your dog has always had the run of the backyard and is not likely to respond to new boundaries, you should plant in raised beds as opposed to developing in-ground annual-vegetable beds. Follow these guidelines for other pets, too, keeping in mind each pet’s habits and how they interact with your garden.

Many people love backyard chickens and rabbits. However, chickens and rabbits love many of the same foods humans do, so letting them roam unsupervised in your annual-vegetable beds can mean that your pet will enjoy the foods you planned to eat. Create dedicated space for chickens and rabbits and

share your harvests with them on your own terms.



## Plum Table Wreath



So much inspiration can be found in the simple beauty of a single perfect plum or lovely heirloom tomato. This ombré “wreath” is made easily with any fruit or vegetable that comes in multiple hues, such as apples, tomatoes, citrus, or even colorful potatoes. It works perfectly as a no-frills table centerpiece—and can even be eaten



later!

## Apply Design Principles

As always, while you progress through the five steps of laying out your backyard, bear in mind the design principles of balance, arrangement, year-round beauty and production, and unified style. Although in the backyard you may have more space and freedom for annual vegetables, a strong sense of design is necessary to hold your garden together visually. Repeating your chosen color theme across your overall landscape and in your annual-vegetable planting beds will help create a balanced and welldesigned backyard.

Vegetables come in almost any color, so it's easy to find something to pick up on your overall color scheme. If red or burgundy is one of your garden's colors, try brightly colored red lettuces massed together for visual effect and colorful herbs like shiso and red-veined sorrel.

### **Here are some colorful annual edibles to plant in your backyard:**

Variegated chartreuse: 'Pesto Perpetuo' basil • variegated land cress

• 'Painted Serpent' cucumber • 'Black-seeded Simpson' lettuce (chartreuse leaves) • 'Alaska' nasturtium (annual that reseeds) • 'Fish' pepper (variegated leaves and peppers)

Burgundy/red: 'Molten Fire' amaranth (red leaves and flower) • 'Bull's Blood' beet • red brussels sprouts • red-stemmed celery • 'Ruby Red' chard • 'Rossa di Treviso Precoce' radicchio • chile de arbol • red corn

• lettuce: 'Lolla Rossa', 'Mascara', 'Red Oak', red romaine • 'Hill Country

Red' okra (red-stemmed plant with red streaked fruit) • red orach • shiso • red-veined sorrel • Malabar spinach • red violas



leFt to rigHt: Variegated land

cress, 'Alaska' nasturtium, 'Fish' pepper.



leFt to rigHt: 'Molten Fire'

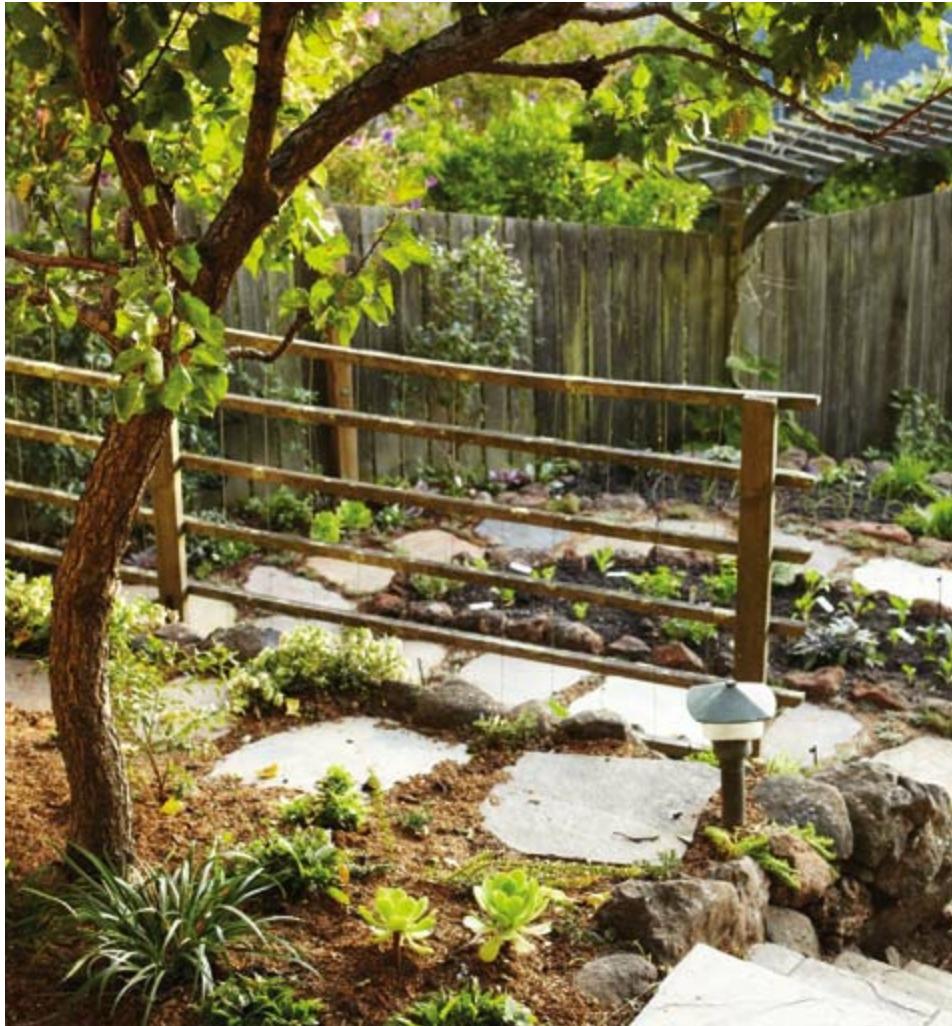
amaranth, red violas, chile de arbol.

yellow: yellow chard • 'Lemon' cucumbers • 'Golden' sweet peas • 'Banana' and yellow sweet bell peppers

purple/blue: purple artichoke • asparagus • 'Dark Opal' and 'African Blue' basil • purple sprouting broccoli • purple cauliflower • purple choi • mustards, including 'Ruby Streaks' and 'Japanese Giant Red' • 'Black Hungarian' peppers (with purple foliage and fruit) • sweet purple bell peppers • 'Filius Blue' pepper • purple tomatillo



leFt tO rigHt: ‘Banana’ pepper, ‘Golden’ sweet peas, ‘Filius Blue’ pepper.



Repeat hardscaping materials to create a balanced garden. Here, the wooden material used for trellising summer and winter annual vegetables is repeated in an overhead arbor used to support vining kiwi. Both trellises work well alongside the weathered wooden garden fence.

In chapter one, we also discussed choosing hardscaping materials for paths, patios, and planting beds to establish balance across a landscape. Using consistent materials counts for the choices you make inside the dedicated annual-vegetable planting beds, too. Repeat just one or two materials—wood or metal, for example—for edible supports such as arbors, trellises, and tomato cages. All are necessary supports in the vegetable garden; keeping them coherent is what makes your vegetable garden work visually. You can use rusted metal structures, bamboo, stainless steel, wattle, salvaged materials, you name it . . . just not all of them, mixed together.



Does this mean that you should not buy those cute colored tomato cages you saw at the nursery? No, it just means you should use them wisely. Choosing one color to repeat and accentuate can be a fun way to add color to the vegetable garden when it comes to both hardscaping and plants. Too many inconsistent materials and colors contribute to a haphazard look.

Try to use matching plant markers, too. They're available in many sizes, materials, shapes, and colors. You can use them to repeat a material or color that complements the design choices already made for the rest of the garden. For example, if you've created an urban modern garden with steel vegetable boxes and bed borders, use metal plant markers to continue the theme. Or, for a more traditional garden, use wax-based crayon to write plant names on reusable slate markers.

This advice also applies to plant ties, which secure vining vegetables to trellises. Pick one type (or two if you must) and stick with it. Green Velcro ties can be reused for years and years. Natural jute twine is another favorite plant-tie material. It sounds simple, but being



A reusable green Velcro tie.

consistent with even the smallest of details will result in a vegetable garden that appears tidy and attractive.

In keeping with the design principle of year-round beauty and production, remember that succession planting can be used to keep your dedicated annual-vegetable garden looking good and productive over multiple seasons. You should keep this principle in mind as you select your backyard fruit trees, too.

**Here are the general harvest seasons of common fruit trees:** late spring:  
apricot • cherry • loquat • nectarine • peach suMMer: apple • apricot • cherry •  
fig • nectarine • peach • pear • plum • pluot  
Fall: almond • apple • Asian pear • fig • olive • persimmon • pomegranate •  
quince

Winter: citrus (once established, some citrus, like Meyer lemons, can produce year-round) • persimmon • pomegranate

Finally, remember to maintain a unified design style for your backyard. If you've started designing the front yard before moving to the backyard, you'll have already selected a design style that works for you. Make the style you've chosen relevant to your entire garden, both front and back, but know that this doesn't mean they have to look exactly the same. Growing conditions such as light exposure in the two yards might be slightly different, so you may be working with different plants in each space. But as you are placing your permanent elements, choose a few materials to repeat to create continuity from the front yard to the backyard.





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**FiVe**

## **Beautiful Edible Containers, Window Boxes, Side Yards, and Other Small Spaces**

One of the most revelatory moments to be had as a home gardener is realizing the incredible volume of food that can be grown in a small space. A large container or two on your front or back porch, window boxes, and narrow in-ground planting beds can all produce food for you to enjoy. Window boxes and narrow or side yard planting beds are usually close enough to your kitchen or front door to make them easy to use and maintain.

When space is limited, make every inch count. In this chapter we will discuss how to utilize the same design principles and planning steps to create a beautiful edible garden that is scaled down to fit these specialized

Opposite: This small urban container garden includes kumquat, lacinato kale, salad greens, and English thyme, plus ornamental aeonium succulents and lobelia.

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spaces. Regardless of whether you are maximizing the productivity of smaller spaces within your larger landscape or utilizing the only space you've got, you can grow plants that will work for you.

### **Container Gardens**

With the right type of container and proper soil, water, and light, you can enjoy a year-round harvest of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Apply design principles to your container garden, just as you would in a front yard or backyard, and you will create a beautiful and productive space no matter the size.

#### **Choosing a Container That Is Right for You**

Before you get caught up in the excitement of picking out plants, remember that, edible or not, your plants need something to grow in. If you live in an apartment or have some deck or patio space, that something is going to be a container. As you are choosing your container, keep food-safe materials in

mind (see chapter two for more information on food-safe materials); if you really like a container but it is not food-safe, you can still include it in your design, just fill it with beautiful flowers.

Containers are exciting because, with just a few key pieces, you can easily define an aesthetic for your small-space garden. You're not necessarily starting with a blank slate as you choose containers. Just as you would look at your home's style and materials for hardscaping and garden-design style inspiration if you were designing a front or backyard, look at your home's exterior for the elements or materials you might like to repeat or contrast in your chosen containers. This will create a unified design effect and overall sense of balance. For example, if the wall of your building is a weathered, white-painted siding, aim for an overall balanced look by choosing containers that repeat the white color and provide a contrasting clean, polished texture.

Different materials can be used to wide-ranging design style effect. A couple of classic terra-cotta pots can be a strong foundation for a cottage





Versatile

terra-cotta can be used to establish a loose cottage garden style.

or Mediterranean-style container garden; arranged differently, however, the same pots can set the scene for a sparse, modern gardenscape. Similarly, galvanized steel can support a rustic, farm-inspired container garden or establish a distinct sense of urban chic.

Whatever style you choose, remember that fewer, larger containers, all in the same one or two materials or colors, will establish a structure that can define the most ramshackle urban space and stand up to the most eclectic plant choices. If you've got a patio full of tiny little mismatched pots, simplify your landscape by paring down the collection: choose just one or two of the smaller pots to use as whimsical accent planters in your small garden landscape.

Above all, remember that the containers need to provide enough space for a plant's roots to grow and hold enough nutrient-rich soil to feed your plant. There are always exceptions, and some plants do not require a lot of depth for their roots, but the minimum container size for most vegetables and herbs is a diameter of eight inches and depth of twelve inches. A diameter of twelve to eighteen inches and a depth of at least fifteen inches is preferable, because the

larger size can better accommodate the necessary volume of soil and water.

The most frequent problem found in container gardens is dry soil. Smaller pots cause the soil to dry out faster than large ones because there is more exposed surface area relative to the total soil. This is yet another factor in favor of fewer, larger containers. In addition to being large enough, containers must have drain holes at the bottom so that water doesn't pool in the pots, drowning plants' roots and making the soil a stinky mess.

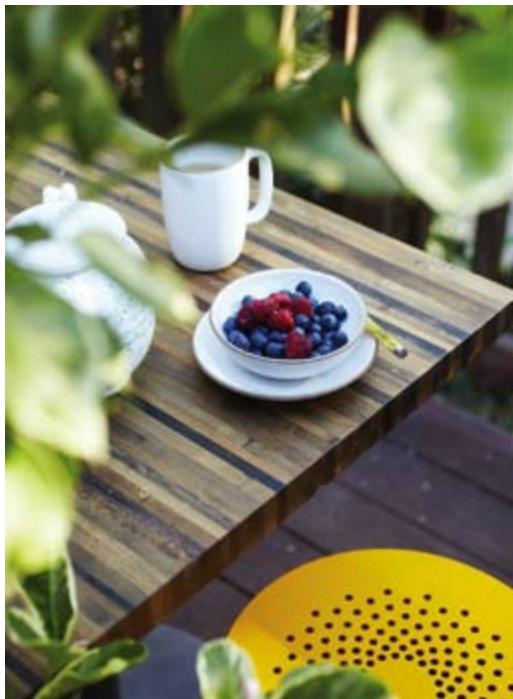
### Growing Conditions for Containers

As you would do for other garden spaces, assess growing conditions of your space and think about placement of your containers with regard to light exposure. Place some of your largest containers in your sunniest spot. These will be the ones that you'll be planting up with larger edibles. A minimum of five to six hours of direct sunlight is ideal for edibles like snap peas, green beans, or cherry tomatoes. Save the smaller pots and darker areas for shade-tolerant edibles like lettuces and mint, or for ornamental plants. As you're placing the containers, remember also that you'll want to be able to easily access the food you're growing, especially greens and other annual vegetables, to harvest and to refresh the soil they are growing in. With this in mind, it is best to place your annual edible planters in an area that you visit often. Tuck ornamentals, fruit trees, and other perennial edibles into less convenient places. Decks and any areas that involve going up and down flights of stairs are good places for lower-maintenance edible plants.

Most vegetables are heavy feeders. Because nutrients are always draining out of your container soil, the key to success with container gardens is to start with a mixture of high-quality organic compost and potting soil, and a regular fertilizing regimen. Fill the pot with a combination of one-half organic potting soil mix and one-half organic compost. Use potting soil and not planting mix or topsoil, because potting soil is formulated to avoid staining your patio or pavers and to enable good drainage. Add a handful or two of dry granulated organic fertilizer and mix well before planting. Then, give your plants a boost each month with either dry or water-based organic fertilizers.

Dry soil stresses out your plants and makes them more susceptible to disease

and pests. Water systems are even more important with container gardens because soil can dry out in a day or in just a few hours depending on the planter's size and the intensity of the summer heat. The best way to avoid the problem is to set up a drip irrigation system (see chapter six). Containers usually can't take deep soaking without draining water and soil onto your porch or patio, so try to set up irrigation for the containers on a separate valve from any in-ground landscaping. Even if you live in a building with nothing in the way of landscaping amenities, you may be able to set up a simple hose bib system and run it from a spigot on the side of the building. For the sake of aesthetics (and better air circulation), put all your containers on small risers (also known as pot feet) so that you can run irrigation tubing up through the bottom of each pot before adding the soil and avoid lots of messy black tubing running over the tops of the containers.



If you can't set up an irrigation system, check your pots and planters often and do not allow the soil to dry out more than an inch below the surface. It is much easier to remember to water your plants if you are enjoying them each day with your morning coffee or tea or sharing an evening meal surrounded by them, so the key to remembering to water your container garden is to create a space that is so beautiful that you'll visit it every day. This way, watering the plants becomes a part of your daily routine and you'll truly be

living in your garden!



### Planting Beautiful Productive Containers

Your space is limited, so you'll need to use it wisely and grow plants that are really transformative to your eating and cooking experience.

You'll also want to choose plants that are well suited to containers. This criteria can yield any number of combinations of plants for your garden—here are a few that no cook should be without:

- A full range of culinary herbs, including herbs for teas and cocktail infusions
- Salad and braising greens
- Citrus, especially lemon or lime
- Easy-to-grow, highly productive annual vegetables such as bush green beans, peppers, cherry tomatoes, chard, and kale



Culinary herbs like parsley are an essential part of any cook's repertoire.

- Harvest-as-you-need-them annual vegetables such as scallions, shallots, and celery



leFt to rigHt:

Kumquat, red onions and green beans, cherry tomatoes.

As you can see, this list of indispensables focuses on ingredients that are used often or regularly in most kitchens, and also on plants that do not need a lot of root space or heavy feeding. It does not include a lot of larger annual vegetables because, for the most part, vegetables like broccoli, carrots, cucumbers, squash, and beefsteak tomatoes do better in the ground where they are assured of plentiful root space and nutrients. If you do want to give one of these a try, though, choose smaller, less sprawling varieties of annual vegetables. Determinate, small-fruited, or cherry-size tomatoes are best. Be sure to use a teepee-style trellis that will not only support the plant but also keep it tidy. Likewise, look for smaller growing bush varieties of vegetables like summer squash and cucumbers. It can be convenient to separate your perennial and annual plantings so that you have some containers that can be left alone and counted on to look good while you spend time maintaining the others.

As you would in a planting bed, your first step is to place your large anchor plants, keeping plant height in mind as you place them. Set the larger plants in the back of the container or, if the container is accessible from all sides, in the center. A dwarf citrus, such as the versatile Meyer lemon, 'Bearriss' lime, or kumquat, is a fantastic place to start. Unlike other dwarf fruit trees like apples or figs that can be suited to container growing, citrus is evergreen and thus is a great anchor or screening plant for any outdoor space.

Citrus is susceptible to frost damage, so place it in a protected area against a wall. If you live in a colder climate, growing citrus in containers is probably the only way to include them in your garden. When you're setting up your

garden and you know winter is going to get frosty, be sure to place your citrus planter on a wheeled base so that you can roll it inside for the cold months.

Other evergreen perennial edibles that look beautiful in container gardens include lavender, rosemary, culinary sweet bay, scented geraniums, and lemongrass. Lemon verbena is a wonderful deciduous perennial herb for tea; because it is tall with bright chartreuse green lacy leaves, it is perfect for placing in the rear of a larger ornamental planting container.

Once you've chosen the larger anchor plants, you'll be ready to start mixing in some medium-size ornamentals and edibles, such as lettuces and colorful chard, around them. Don't forget flowers here, too, because every garden, no matter how small, should have some. Plant edible flowers, like scented geraniums, nasturtiums, agastache, or *Viola odorata*, and let your herbs go to flower.

Fresh salad greens are a delicious addition to your meals. Lettuces and salad greens are also beautiful accent plants that can be grown in smaller containers, even shallow tabletop planters. Use them for annual color; they also look pretty grouped together in colorful masses. You'll really notice the difference in flavor, especially with spicy greens like arugula and watercress, whose profile fades quickly in grocery stores. If you're not yet familiar with cut-and-come-again salad greens, the speed at which just a few plants will grow back and provide you with yet another delicious meal can seem like a small miracle. There are also many unusual, beautiful, or especially tasty lettuces such as 'Freckles', 'Black-seeded Simpson', and 'Red Galactica' that grow well in containers. Even kales, mustards, and chards can be grown in small containers if you plant them close together and harvest as baby salad greens. If you want to plant salad greens like lettuce or arugula for daily use, just make sure that you save some space to do some succession plantings.

Annual vegetables such as scallions, shallots, bulbing onions, celery, chard, kale, lettuce, peppers, and bush green beans can all be included in a mixed ornamental plant container. If you choose edibles with long harvest seasons (like onions and shallots) for container plantings they will last for



These urban modern container plantings in partial shade are anchored with ornamental begonias, succulents, and elephant ears, plus edible English thyme. Brightly colored red, chartreuse, and speckled lettuces accentuate the color and texture in this unexpected edible setting.



A cottage-style arrangement of edible viola flowers, 'Berggarten' sage, French culinary thyme, and variegated 'White Anniversary' oregano.

six to nine months; celery, kale, and chard, if placed in a shadier spot, will last through the growing season, making them great choices if you can't harvest them right away. The wide green leaves of green beans are pretty and serve as a lovely backdrop for surrounding flowers in an ornamental planting; just tuck them in a sunny spot and harvest in a couple of weeks. Hot and sweet peppers are a beautiful addition to any ornamental planting too, and will hang around ripening and getting spicier until you need them.

Lastly, finish off with low-growing edibles in the smaller spaces next to the container's lip. Herbs like groundcover thyme or oregano, or edible flowers like nasturtiums, will cascade over the container's side, creating a beautiful arrangement. You can also tuck colorful, variegated sage into any number of small spaces. If you want to soften up the look of a planter with a dwarf tree in it, add an underplanting of mint, viola, and dangling strawberries. For a modern look, a simple underplanting of groundcover chamomile, succulents, or gravel mulch does the trick.

## Tea and Cocktail Gardens

In addition to being staples in the kitchen, many of the wonderful herbs that grow well in containers can be used to make tea and cocktails. If you've never tried sage bergamot or rosemary lemon tea, you are in for a real treat. Herbs also make delicious simple syrups that can be added to carbonated water or used to infuse alcohol for fun cocktails. Dedicate a single container as a "tea garden" or "cocktail garden" and plant it with all kinds of herbs, including chamomile, lemon verbena, and mint.

There's no need to keep all your tea and cocktail herbs together, though. Because so many favorite herbs are also colorful, flowering perennials, you can dot them in various containers throughout the garden.



Plant a gourmet mint collection. Don't just plant peppermint when there are so many to choose from: apple, ginger, pineapple, chocolate, spearmint, banana, Persian, and strawberry mint round out this collection. Used as a part of a stylized Mediterranean garden, Italian-style urns keep the mints from taking over the rest of the herb garden.

Whichever herbs you choose, they are easy to put to use. You can dry herbs and make your own tea bags out of muslin, or simply grab a few handfuls of fresh herbs to put in your teapot. Note that tea made from fresh herbs takes longer to steep than tea made from dried herbs. Pour boiling water over the fresh herbs and let them steep for fifteen to twenty minutes.



Culinary sweet bay, oregano, thyme, mint, and rosemary are all great ingredients for tea and cocktails.

Simple syrups to use in cocktails are made by heating sugar and water together over medium heat. Once the sugar has dissolved, turn off your burner, add the desired herb, and let steep. Once the syrup has cooled for fifteen to twenty minutes, strain, and then use. A basil-infused simple syrup is an excellent sweetener for freshly squeezed lemonade and is the basis for a number of refreshing summer cocktails. Edible fruit and flowers such as cucumbers, lemon, rhubarb stalks, berries, and elderberry flowers are also great homegrown additions to your repertoire of cocktail ingredients.

## **Some favorite herbs for making tea or cocktails are:**

anise hyssop • bergamot • chamomile •  
dill • lavender (great mixed with mint) •  
lemon verbena • mint (note that mint is  
quite invasive and can take over your herb  
garden quickly, unless it is constrained by  
edging, planted in its own container, or  
slowed down by shade conditions) • rose  
hips • rosemary • sage • tarragon •  
thyme



## Window Boxes

If your garden space is limited or you simply like the look and convenience of a window box, they can be productive, too. Window boxes are typically long and narrow; although they have limited space, design principles should still be applied to create a beautiful, edible garden.

### Growing Conditions for Window Boxes

If your window boxes do not have their own irrigation system, then make watering a bit easier for yourself by placing them near a water source, like the window outside your kitchen. As with other containers, choose foodsafe materials for your window box; wood is always a good option. Window boxes should be filled with a combination of potting soil and organic compost; you will need to refresh the soil periodically with fertilizer and compost. Drought-tolerant herbs can survive in a sunny spot, but keep in mind that many window boxes are small and subjected to windy, dry conditions that are difficult for even the hardiest plant to take. If you have multiple windows to place window boxes on, try to avoid south-facing windows because those boxes will face the harshest, full-sun conditions with little to no shade. Set yourself up to succeed: it is worth paring down your window boxes to the ones that are the most protected.



Planted full and with attention to color and contrasting textures, this window box includes marjoram, chives, purple basil, Greek oregano, scented geranium, tarragon, purple culinary sage, 'Spicy Globe' bush basil, variegated lemon thyme, and 'Spicy Orange' thyme.

### Planting Beautiful, Productive Window Boxes

Once your window boxes are installed, the next step is to decide which plants to put in them. There is a whole range of perennial culinary herbs with lower water needs that make great window-box plantings, including oregano, marjoram, sage, thyme, dwarf rosemary, and tarragon. These perennials are wonderful additions to your cooking and will look beautiful in your window box until you need them. You can also use succession planting with annual herbs such as parsley, cilantro, chervil, dill, and basil. So, if you are growing them, save some space for multiple plantings.

If you want to make maintenance easier, plant herbs according to their growing requirements. For example, put Mediterranean herbs such as rosemary, oregano, sage, and thyme together in one window box. They are all sun-loving, perennial, and pretty tough, so they require less feeding, watering, and overall attention.

Similarly, group sensitive annual edibles such as lettuce, cilantro, and parsley together. Window boxes that face east and get only morning sun or that open up into a narrow canyon of shade between buildings can be planted with these annual herbs, although they require regular watering and their container

should not be allowed to become dry.

Lettuces and baby braising greens have very shallow root systems and can thrive with as little as one inch of soil depth, however, these plants will bolt, or go to flower, almost immediately if they get thirsty. So, putting them in a sunny spot that's likely to get dried out from time to time, even if just for a few hours, is not a good idea.



Three hours of sunlight, especially in a spot that is protected from wind and its drying effect, is enough to keep plants like parsley, cilantro, and radicchio growing (if not especially quickly) in a window box. This is perfect if you like to use these herbs and vegetables in smaller, less-frequent quantities. Add a few edible flowers like violas or calendula to your window box and you have the makings of a tasty salad.

If you have a window box that opens into deeper shade or wind, you can try growing an heirloom mint collection. Mint's invasive growing habit makes it a good candidate for its own container or window box, so that it can't choke out other plants. As mentioned in the sidebar on page 160, there are many wonderful mint varieties to explore.

Adding a few succulents, planting herbs close together to create a full and abundant look, and using colorful varieties of herbs, like 'Tricolor' sage and

purple basil, go a long way to creating a beautiful and productive planting. Keep plant arrangement in mind as you place the herbs, choosing plants with different growth heights, leaf shapes, and textures to create an interesting, balanced planting.



## Purple Basil

One of the best arrangement alternatives to traditional flowers is flowering herbs. They are perfect for adding layers of scent and texture to any floral creation. The dark, bicoloored leaves and delicate flower plumes of purple basil can't be beat. Lush, deep green on the top side and a delicate rich purple on the underside, purple basil's spicy-sweet intoxicating scent pairs beautifully with rosemary, spearmint, thyme, oregano, and lavender. In your own garden you can let herbs flower and go to seed and reap the design benefits of these fresh



and wild elements.



## Side Yards and Other Small Spaces

The narrow planting beds often found surrounding patios and in side yards don't need to be wasted space. The same principles and steps for creating a beautiful edible garden apply here, too.

## Assessing Your Garden Conditions

As with your other spaces, the first thing to do is assess the growing conditions—light exposure, soil, food safety, and water. Avoid planting any plant with a deep root system, such as culinary sweet bay or fig, right against the side of your house because it can be problematic for your house foundation. And remember that the first eighteen inches from your house wall is the most likely area to find lead, so you should always test your soil before deciding what to plant.

## Planting for Small, Narrow Spaces

Perennial evergreen edible shrubs like pineapple guava, lavender, and rosemary are good full-sun plant choices in narrow spaces, espe

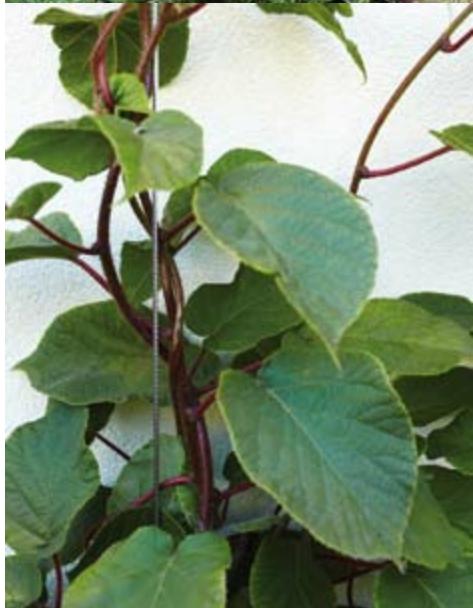


cially if you are seeking to screen a house foundation. Other edible hedging choices (see page 89), such as blueberries, are also good because their smaller root systems and ability to grow in most sun exposures make them versatile.

When working with narrow spaces along a fence, trellised edible vines such as kiwi, passion fruit, or grape can be another excellent option. Cane berries such as blackberries and raspberries can also be trellised in narrow planting beds. If your planting bed is adjacent to a pathway that's frequently used, as is often the case in side yards, seek out thornless varieties of your favorite cane berries. Blackberries, boysenberries, and raspberries all have a thornless option that make a good planting choice.

Side yards typically connect your front and back gardens and therefore should reflect their design style. Choose one or two plant or hardscaping

elements to repeat from the front to the back, to create a seamless transition. In a shorter bed, keep it simple and plant a single plant variety for



Left: 'Tuscan Blue' rosemary in a narrow Mediterranean-style planting bed.

Right : Plant edible vines in narrow garden spaces. The kiwi's red stems and fuzzy winter hanging fruit are beautiful in any garden and can add a graphic, modern feel to a planting. Plant in pairs, because kiwi will not fruit without both a male and a female plant together.

Opposite: Strawberries, Greek oregano, and pollinator-attracting purple alyssum fill out this ten-inch planting bed in an urban setting.





Trellised grapes put vertical space to use in this narrow planting. A massed underplanting of ornamental Western sword ferns finish out the bed.

a clean, consistent look. Treat longer narrow beds like any other planting area, deciding upon a focal point and then filling in with anchor and other supporting plants. If the focus is a beautiful gate at the end of the pathway, then don't distract from it with a showy planting.

Espaliered fruit trees trained to grow flat against a fence or wall are another way to make a narrow space edible. An espaliered tree can fit into a one- to two-foot-wide planting bed. Underplanted with groundcover herbs, this planting can be a visually striking and productive use of a challenging space. You can choose a couple of different groundcovers in a variety of colors and textures and plant them in adjacent, asymmetrical clusters to create an abstract pattern.

Chamomile, sage, strawberries, and thyme (creeping, lemon, and variegated) look really beautiful together.

Fan-shaped espalier trees make an especially dramatic focal point in a bed running along a large windowless wall. Plum, peach, fig, and citrus are the trees most often trained into this shape. Many times the warmest spot in a

garden is along a wall where heat is reflected and multiplied and where frost never really takes hold. Take advantage of this and try varieties like sweet orange that love warm conditions and that you may not have realized you could grow.

Multigraft or “fruit cocktail” espalier trees are another exciting option. These specialty fruit trees have multiple varieties of fruit grafted onto a single trunk, providing you with different harvests, all on one tree. In small spaces it makes sense to introduce more variety and extend your fruiting season as much as possible. Multigraft espalier trees are easy to find at your local nursery, and you’ll often find a selection of early, mid-, and late-season varieties. For a different look, try planting a series of apple or other columnar fruit trees. These trees are pruned to have a tall upright shape, so they yield slightly smaller crops, but they are a great fit for a tight corner.



Espaliered apple, pear, and fig trees were used for this narrow side yard planting area rather than traditional trees because the yard is only about ten feet wide. The garden gets dappled light throughout the day, making it a good spot for apple, pear, and fig rather than heat-loving peach or plum. All three trees are deciduous, so for part of the year the trellising serves as the main structural anchor. Attractive cabling supports and simple posts were chosen in the same redwood material used as borders in the rest of the garden.



**Six**

# Planting and Maintaining Your Beautiful Edible Garden

Now that you have the steps and principles for designing a beautiful edible garden, and you've seen how to apply them to different parts of your yard, it's time to get your hands dirty and make it happen. How to prepare, plant, maintain, and harvest your edible garden are the final things you need to know to complete your garden transformation, and they are not difficult once you are keyed into the following simple concepts.

## Building Healthy Soil

The health of your ornamental and edible plants, and therefore, the success of your edible garden, depends on the quality of the soil in your garden.

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### Soil Testing

Before you plant a single edible plant, it is a good idea to have your soil tested for contaminants, specifically heavy metals such as lead. (See Resources for labs that test soil.) Lead can come from many sources but often makes its way into soil from lead-based housepaint. The good news is that it generally does not travel far, so if it is present in your garden, it will usually be found within eighteen inches of the nearest house wall. To learn whether you have lead in your garden, take a soil sample from within those eighteen inches. Then take one or two more separate samples from different planting beds in the yard. All you need is a hand shovel, a few plastic bags, and a permanent ink pen to label the bags. For each sample, dig down one to two inches and collect soil from between two and six inches below the surface. To make sure the sample is representative, take three or four scoops of soil from a different spot in the same area or planting bed. Seal the bag and write the location of the sample on the bag. Once you've mailed the samples in, turnaround can be as quick as two weeks. Most labs will include results for nutrient levels, pH, and trace minerals in their report, along with basic recommendations for soil amendments. Taking the time to test your soil will save you a lot of worry and is a wise choice when growing food.

## Soil Preparation

While removing soil used to be standard practice in general landscaping, we discourage this approach. Soil is a resource, and you don't need to waste it. The first two inches or so of dirt in your garden is commonly called topsoil. It contains organic matter, soil particles, nutrients, and minerals and, unless it is contaminated with lead or other heavy metals, there is no need to remove it.

Instead, simply amend your garden's native soil with organic compost. Compost adds nutrients and organic matter to all types of soil and is the ultimate problem solver. If your soil is too heavy and claylike, compost will improve the soil texture and create space for air circulation. If your soil is too sandy, add compost to bring in organic matter to help with water retention and soil structure. You cannot go wrong by adding compost to your garden. If you are creating an organic garden, you can make your own organic compost, too (see Starting a Compost Bin, page 176).

You should plan on adding one to three inches of compost and some organic fertilizer to existing planting beds. Use a pitchfork or digging shovel to mix it in and aerate the planting area, removing any weeds and digging down a good eight to twelve inches. We like to use a pitchfork (see page 184) to wiggle the soil around; just be aware of neighbor



ing plants and work around them to avoid damaging their roots.

If your soil is dry and difficult to work with you will need to soak the planting area in advance of working compost into the ground. Water the planting bed for a couple of hours, either by running your irrigation in the planting bed or by running a hose and an oscillating sprinkler attachment in the area. Let the planting bed drain for twenty-four to forty-eight hours before working in the compost. Similarly, if your soil is too moist from seasonal rain or over-irrigation (if there is visible standing water and mudlike conditions), you will need to wait until the soil dries out a bit. The goal is to aerate the soil and not compact it, which is what will happen if you work with water-saturated soil. It is worth the extra effort to get your soil preparation right because it makes all the difference in how your plants will grow.

For a new raised bed, combine planting mix with an equal amount of organic compost—the actual total amount will depend upon the size of the bed. Next, using a pitchfork or a shovel, mix the two together, add some

organic fertilizer, and rake it smooth. You are now ready to plant your vegetables, perennial herbs, and flowers. For a polished look, add a thin layer of finished compost around the plants when you are done.

The best practice for an intensively planted vegetable garden is to add compost and organic fertilizer regularly. Each year, and sometimes each season, add up to an inch of compost and more fertilizer and turn it all in again. Doing this helps maintain the soil's nutrient levels and keeps the soil's texture soft and crumbly with lots of air pockets for good oxygen circulation and space for root growth.

## Starting a Compost Bin

Every once in a while, a lettuce bolts or a pear is left on the tree until it is mushy. When this happens, you don't need to throw out the product of all of your hard work. Give it a second life by tossing it into a compost bin instead, and with time it will transform into a high-nutrient compost that you can use to feed your garden. Recycling garden waste in your own compost bin is a huge step toward making your garden more sustainable. A contained compost system (see Resources for suppliers) tends to work best for the home gardener. You could also make your own freestanding compost pile, but because they tend to be large and more unsightly, situate your freestanding pile out of sight, around a corner.

The basic idea of composting is to combine equal parts of brown and green materials with a little water and a little soil, and then let Mother Nature take her course! Aerating the compost (turning the pile with a pitchfork or shovel to introduce more oxygen to it) hastens its transformation. Or you can be lazy like us and wait for it to decompose at its own pace. Be sure to bury or cover any fruit or vegetable scraps that you add to the compost bin, so as not to attract any unwanted scavengers like raccoons or mice. There are a lot of opinions in the gardening world about what to put in the compost bin. We favor a healthy and easy approach for the home gardener, in combination with your own common sense.

### **Compost ingredients:**

brOWn Matter: dried leaves, straw, and crushed eggshells. You can compost tree and shrub clippings, but they can take a long time to break down.

green Matter: vegetable plants, fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, uncomposted chicken and rabbit manure, and lawn clippings. Be careful not to dump huge layers of grass because it will settle, compact, and become putrid; mix in clip pings, leaves, and branches to keep air circulating.

DO nOt cOMpOst: animal and

dairy products including meat scraps, bones, and cheese (these can attract rats and vermin to your compost bin); diseased plants, especially those affected by blights and fungus (you may spread the disease in your garden through your compost); invasive plants that you do not want in your garden; plants with pests on them; dog and cat waste; oils; and yard trimmings treated



with chemical pesticides.

## Composting with Worms

Worm bins are a great way to recycle food scraps and turn them into a garden resource. Vermiculture, or composting with worms, is an alternative to a compost bin, especially if you don't have enough space for a compost bin. Worm bins fit nicely into any small, tucked-away space you've got. You can find basic worm bins in simple designs that will not distract from your garden style (see Resources). Set the bin up in a cool shady spot and feed the worms with your kitchen and garden scraps. Then harvest the rich, nutritious worm poop or castings, and put a layer of the castings on the soil around your plants each month. A small number of red wriggler worms produces enough castings to nicely supplement the other organic soil fertilizers you're adding to your garden each month.

## Water

Edible gardens are not, in general, low-water endeavors. If you turn the water down on your edibles, some of them will stay alive, but they may not be as productive or quick to grow. That said, there are ways to use water more efficiently when watering your plants. Here are a few water-smart tips.

### Irrigation Systems

Drip irrigation is a water-efficient system often used in vegetable gardens and is well worth the investment and installation time, especially if you live in a part of the country with water restrictions. If you are incorporating edibles into a planting bed with an existing overhead spray system, you do not need to replace your system, but you may want to install a more efficient sprayhead like microspray. Microspray is an option for both drip and overhead spray systems and it is an excellent way to water smaller annual edibles like salad greens, radishes, and bush beans that are planted successional throughout a bed. Whatever system you use, be sure to check your irrigation system on a regular basis for leaks and broken heads, which can waste a lot of water.

## When to Water

Being waterwise also includes choosing optimum times to run your irrigation. Water your garden in the early morning—especially during summer’s high temperatures—to avoid excessive evaporation. Watering at this time of day also gives the leaf and soil surfaces time to dry out so that they are not sitting damp for hours, becoming breeding grounds for bacteria and disease.

No plant, even those classified as low water, can handle low-water conditions when first planted in hot weather. Water newly planted gardens more frequently for the first couple of weeks (how often depends upon the plants and weather). Once your plants have had the opportunity to establish themselves, you can turn down the water.

## When to Plant

If the weather is warm, plant during the cooler times of day and water your plants a couple of times daily, as needed. It is easier for plants to establish themselves in the garden if planted during the cooler months before the stress of summer’s heat. Fall and early spring are the optimum times of year to add large numbers of perennial plants to your garden.

## Greywater

Greywater is recycled water from your home’s kitchen sinks, showers, and washing machines. Greywater systems, the mechanisms that funnel recycled water to your garden, are excellent for many sustainable backyard ecosystems and can be used to irrigate your garden, including some edibles. Fruit trees and shrubs can safely be watered with greywater once it has gone through a filtering process. It is not typically recommended for irrigating leafy greens and other edibles such as strawberries that grow close to the ground and come into contact with the water directly. Blackwater, on the other hand, is water that has come into contact with waste products (i.e., water from the toilet) and is not considered food safe. For more information on greywater and how to incorporate it into your overall landscape plans, see the Resources.

## Choosing Seeds and Plants

There are a number of terms that describe seeds and plant starts, or seedlings. Three of the more important to understand are “heirloom,” “hybrid,” and “organic.” But what do they all mean and how do you know which plant to choose? Start by taking a look at the plant tag or seed packet. Growers will note if the plant or seed variety is an heirloom or hybrid plant and if it has been grown organically. We’ve also included some fantastic online heirloom, organic seed suppliers and growers in the Resources.



Italian heirloom borlotti beans are beautiful in the garden. These colorful beans, also known as cranberry beans, can be eaten fresh or dried. Don’t forget to save a few to plant the following year.

## Heirloom

Heirloom plants are typically understood to be those varieties that have been around for fifty years or so. They are beloved for their flavor, unique appearance, and sheer variety. They are grown from open-pollinated seeds, collected from plants that are pollinated by natural sources. What this means is that, unlike hybrid plants, if you grow an heirloom plant and let it produce seeds, you can save and replant that seed to grow a plant that has the same

characteristics as its parent plant. This is how these seeds have been passed down through generations. Heirloom varieties can be less disease-resistant than some hybrids, but they are really exciting to grow in home gardens for their unique appearance and taste, as well as for their amazing names. Who wouldn't want to try 'Pink Flamingo' chard?

## Hybrid

A hybrid plant is created by purposely cross-pollinating two different varieties of the same or similar plant. This is often done to create a vegetable that is more disease-resistant, more uniform in size and appearance, and to increase other desirable traits. These vegetables tend to be reliable producers and suffer from fewer plant diseases. However, you cannot save their



'Pink Flamingo' chard brightens up the garden with its colorful stems.

seeds to use the following year because they will not produce the same plant. 'Sungold' tomatoes are one of the better-known hybrids; they're easy to grow, produce sweet fruit, and are quite a delight to have in the garden. But, for all their ease, hybrids can be a bit boring: you may notice that the tomatoes are always the same—there's never any real differences among the fruit the way there is with an heirloom variety.

## Organic

Transplants and seeds that are labeled organic have been grown without any, or very limited, exposure to synthetic chemical pesticides, fertilizers, or other growth enhancements. Does it matter if the plant start you just picked up at the nursery is organic or not? Only you can answer that question for yourself. In terms of your health, what you do with the transplant once you've planted it in your garden is more important than how it spent



the first weeks of its life. However, a great way to support the growers who are using organic methods and stewarding their land sustainably is to buy seeds and plants from them.

Local

Local is another consideration in choosing vegetable transplants for your garden. Plants that are locally grown will acclimate and transition to your garden's climate much easier than a transplant grown in a greenhouse thousands of miles away. Not only will you be buying a better plant but also fewer resources will have been used to get it to your garden and you'll have supported local business. To find locally grown plants, visit your neighborhood farmers' market or independent nursery, instead of buying from larger national big-box stores that tend to order plants from all across the country.

## Toxic Plants

There are also some plants with toxic qualities that you may want to consider carefully before planting, depending on who will be using your garden. Leaves of the rhubarb, tomato, and passion fruit plants can give you or your pet a stomachache if eaten. This doesn't mean you shouldn't plant rhubarb if you have kids or pets. But you should have the information to make choices that make sense for you and your garden. If your pet likes to eat plants, consider setting plants with toxic foliage in protected, raised, or hard-to-reach spaces. Do the same for any plants you think your children might be attracted to. Many kids would not think to eat the leaves of a 'Sungold' tomato when the fruit is so sweet, but if yours does, planting lots of nontoxic and tasty edibles in the tomato plant's path or simply waiting until your child is older before growing these plants may be good choices for you.

### **Here's a list of some plants that can make you sick (depending on the amount eaten):**

poisonous ornamentals: angel's trumpet, *Brugmansia* (*Datura* also) • azalea • calla lily, *Zantedeschia* • castor oil plant, *Ricinus communis* • columbine, *Aquilegia* • daffodil, *Narcissus* • delphinium • English ivy, *Hedera helix* • euphorbia • foxglove, *Digitalis* • hellebore or lenten rose, *Helleborus* • hydrangea • iris • larkspur • lily of the valley, *Convallaria majalis* • monkshood, *Aconitum* • nettle or stinging nettle • oleander, *Nerium oleander* • rhododendron • flowering tobacco, *Nicotina* • tulip

edibles with foliage/leaves or berries that can make you sick: plants in

the Solanum/Nightshade family, including eggplant, pepino, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes • leaves of rhubarb and passion fruit (edible *Passiflora*) • leaves and unripe berries of the elderberry shrub • berries of the asparagus plant (which fruits after it flowers)

## Tools

There are a couple of tools that will make growing and caring for your edible plants a lot easier. The pitchfork is one of the most useful to have in your collection. It may remind you of a farm, but that's okay because it is really handy in a garden, too. The pitchfork is our favorite tool to use for turning soil in annual-vegetable garden beds before each seasonal planting. It is also great for turning compost and prepping large holes for trees and shrubs in your other planting beds.

Shovels and hand trowels are two important tools for preparing the soil in planting beds that have perennial plants growing in them. Unlike a dedicated annual-vegetable bed that can be amended and worked thoroughly each season with a pitchfork, a planting bed where annual vegetables are mixed with perennial ornamentals and edibles cannot be fully turned over each season. It is still important to prepare the soil, though, so, in the areas closest to the perennial plant roots, you'll need a hand trowel to work the soil carefully before adding new annual vegetables each season.



Left to right:  
Bypass-style pruners, pitchfork, wooden plant tags.

Other tools or items that make a lot of sense to have on hand include hand pruners, harvest baskets, and the often-overlooked garden journal. Committing details to paper about the seasons' annual vegetables, including location, variety, and source, is one of the easiest ways to keep a record of your garden's bounty and manage crop rotation. Plant tags or markers can disappear over the growing season and always seem to do so on the one tomato you really loved but forgot the name of. Gardeners often get "winter amnesia" and forget the names of the plants they really loved from the previous year. When spring hits and the nurseries are filled with countless choices, it is helpful to have a reminder of the varieties you loved and, just as important, did *not* love from the previous year. Especially for hard-to-find



Garden journal.

varieties, keeping track of where you purchased seeds or transplants can save you a lot of time and energy.

Plant tags or markers that you can reuse over multiple seasons are very useful. With so many plant choices available, it's good to know which variety is in your garden. Buy blank tags, rather than ones preprinted with plant names, which allow you to write the exact plant variety you are growing on the tag.

## Planting Techniques

It may seem simple, but we get questions about how to plant a plant at almost every garden class we teach. Whether you are planting a four-inch vegetable transplant or a twenty-five-gallon fruit tree, the key to success lies in loosening the plant's root ball before placing it in the ground. Especially if the roots are "root bound" or growing in circles around themselves, the goal is to massage or "tickle" them enough to get most of the roots hanging down loosely, ready to settle into the soil and grow outward in search of food.



To plant a smaller transplant such as an annual vegetable, start by pinching the bottom of the container to loosen the roots from the sides of the container. Next, gently slide the transplant out of the container into your hand. Never pull a plant out by its neck. Once the plant is out of the container, tickle its roots and place it in the prepared area of the ground.





You can use the same approach for larger plants, but because they are heavy and often unwieldy, it is not always as simple. An effective alternative for larger fruit trees and shrubs involves placing the plant in the hole while it's still in its container. First dig the hole, then cut the bottom of the container off and place the plant into the hole using the container's handles to help you maneuver it. Once you have the plant situated, simply cut off the sides of the container and lift them away. Use your shovel to gently loosen the roots. This method can be easier on the plant and helps avoid breaking its branches.

## Mulch

Mulch is a protective layer of material spread on top of the garden's soil to help it retain moisture, reduce soil erosion and runoff, suppress weed growth, and, in the case of organic mulches, contribute nutrients to the soil. For a really finished, clean look, mulch creates a uniform appearance in planting beds and allows the plants to shine.

Wood chips or bark are commonly used to mulch gardens, but because they are carbonaceous, they can actually divert some of the nitrogen in your soil and use it as part of their decomposition process. Eventually the wood chips break down and help your soil, but along the way, your soil can be depleted

of nitrogen and your plants can go hungry. Likewise, inorganic mulches made from plastics or recycled tires are not good choices because they can leach toxins into your soil instead of feeding it.

Woody, manure-based composts are a better choice for mulch. Because they contain a mix of carbonaceous and nitrogenous materials, they break down without taking nutrients away from your plants, feeding the soil and adding organic matter along the way. One important thing to note is that these mulches can be “hot” because their decomposition process is not complete. To keep the mulch from damaging plants, mulch around the base of the plants but keep it an inch or so away from the stem. Once you’ve spread the mulch out, hose it down with water. It will cool off in a matter of days.

Use finished compost—that is, compost that has fully decomposed and is cool to the touch—as mulch in your annual vegetable beds and save the woodier manure-based mulch for your ornamental beds. By using finished compost as mulch, it is less likely that your tender annual-vegetable seedlings will be burned by the heat generated by decomposing, unfinished compost. If your ornamental beds have annual edibles integrated in, you will need to move the mulch aside when adding compost and digging holes for fresh seasonal plantings.



## Organic Garden Maintenance

Like most plants, edibles need some attention to thrive. However, caring for a garden is not as overwhelming as some people think, and a lot of your work is done for you if you've invested in your soil health and nutrient base. You will find that perennial edible plants require less maintenance than annual vegetables do. However, all your plants will need some care in the form of pruning, fertilizing, and organic pest and disease control.

### Organic Pest and Disease Control

Organic gardening methods are the logical choice if your aim is to grow clean and healthy food for you and your family to eat. Going organic means not using synthetic fertilizers or broad-spectrum pesticides in your garden. Instead, you can improve your soil using natural, chemical-free amendments (more about these later), so that the soil is robust enough to support plants that are naturally more resilient against pest and disease. Dedicating time and attention to your garden so that you notice what is going on with your plants is key to being able to nip problems in the bud before you are tempted to turn

to toxic applications. Fortunately, if you've created a beautiful garden that is well designed and that you enjoy as part of your daily life, you'll already be out there; awareness of your garden's health will come naturally.

An integrated edible landscape means that your food will be growing right alongside ornamental plants. How you treat your ornamental plants is just as important as how you treat the food you grow. Peppers look great planted among your roses, but if you are spraying your roses with insecticides or fertilizing with



Sweet bell peppers planted among iceberg roses.

systemic fertilizer, you should rethink planting vegetables with them—or, better yet, rethink how you care for your roses.

There are great organic pest control options, like attracting beneficial insects or using neem oil and organic fertilizers, which are easily accessible at most garden centers, nurseries, and online suppliers. Planting techniques such as crop rotation, companion planting, and plant selection based upon disease resistance also go a long way toward creating a chemical-free garden.

#### beneFicial insects

You can easily attract pollinators and other beneficial insects to your mixed ornamental and edible garden. The following four methods for doing so also

support growing healthy organic food and creating a garden that is beautiful throughout the year!

### 1. Do not use broad-spectrum pesticides.

We do not recommend using broad-spectrum pesticides in your garden. Sure, spraying copious amounts of pesticides will kill garden pests immediately in any given area, but it will also kill the beneficial insects. Broad-spectrum pesticides do not discriminate between pest and friend. If all the insects in your garden are zapped with broad-spectrum pesticides, not only will your zucchini plants not get pollinated, but you will have also created a welcome environment for the next pest that flies into your garden because you've eliminated all its natural predators.

### 2. Give beneficial insects time to find a food source and establish themselves in your garden.

Natural pest control does not happen with the touch of a button or spray of a can. Beneficial insects need time to establish themselves, and they will not make their homes and

lay their eggs in your garden without a food source. For example, adult ladybugs will eat aphids, but it is their newly hatched children (larva) that devour them. Once a ladybug finds a good food source for her kids, she lays her eggs right on the spot. Granted, it's not easy to let aphids run wild on your roses while you're waiting for the ladybugs. In the meantime, you can try this



more sustainable, long-term approach: treat your plants on an individual basis, knocking aphids off of some plants with a stiff spray of water or a spray of organic neem oil applied directly to and only on the aphids. Which plants you treat is up to you, but if you have a favorite for cutting and bringing inside, spray the aphids on this one and leave them alone on the other plants. If you leave the aphids alone for a few days, once the beneficial insects find them in your garden they will get to work eating aphids, laying their eggs, and making a home in your garden.

### 3. Plant for diversity and year-round blooms.

Many of the plants that make your garden beautiful will also appeal to pollinators. By choosing plants for your garden that provide visual interest and flowers throughout the year, you'll also be providing pollinators with a steady supply of pollen, increasing the chances that they will make a home nearby and visit your garden often.

### 4. Plant herbs throughout the garden and let them flower.

Letting your herbs go to flower is one of the easiest ways to please pollinators. Place herbs in areas where you will also be planting fruit and vegetable plants that need to be pollinated. Of course, if you want fresh herbs for cooking, you can harvest the part of the plant that you need, just leave part of the plant to flower.

## crOp rOtatiOn

Used in traditional vegetable patches and on organic farms, crop rotation is the practice of planting vegetables in different annual-vegetable planting beds each year, so that plant-specific nutrient deficiencies, diseases, and pest populations do not have a chance to build up in one area. By rotating crops between beds, no one single bed becomes depleted of nutrients, which leads to plant disease and failure. You should practice this in your own dedicated annual-vegetable garden beds if possible.

Vegetables are grouped by plant family and then moved around garden beds according to these family groups. If space allows, you can separate your vegetables into as many as five groups, but we find that three basic groups



Three separate planting beds for vegetables make for easy crop rotation.

work well for the home garden: brassicas (broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, kale), legumes (beans and peas), and nightshades (tomatoes and peppers). Herbs, lettuces and alliums (onions) can be considered neutral

plants in most home gardens and do not need to be rotated so carefully.

The rotation order is based on what the plants do to the soil. Legumes put nitrogen into the soil while the heavy-feeding nightshade and brassica families take it out. Traditional companion planting wisdom keeps brassicas away from tomatoes and other nightshade plants because they do not grow well together. So, in any given planting area you can start with nightshade plants, follow with brassicas, and finish with legumes to help replenish the soil. You can start this rotation at anywhere in the cycle though, so, for example, if you start with brassicas, your next planting can be legumes. It can also be lettuces or any of the more neutral vegetable plantings. Crop rotation helps a lot of soil-management work get done, but you should still add fresh compost and fertilizer to your beds each season. However, you'll find yourself having to buy less fertilizer, use less compost, and use fewer materials for pest and disease control.

In many home gardens, space is limited, and so moving sun-loving tomatoes among planting beds is not an option. Sometimes, you only have one really sunny spot. If this is the case in your garden, you will need to be extra diligent about your soil health and preparation—adding organic compost, composted chicken manure, and other fertilizers and amendments to your planting bed before planting the season's tomatoes. The better prepared your soil is, the more disease resistance your annual vegetables will have.

Choosing disease-resistant tomatoes and removing plants at the first sign of blight or other soil-based diseases are also good practices for the single-bed garden. It is possible to grow tomatoes until Thanksgiving in some areas, but even if that's your situation don't wait that long—take them out at the end of October. As the weather gets colder the plants become more susceptible to soil-based diseases, and if you let them stay in the ground you are setting yourself up for future headaches. Allowing a soil-based plant disease to make a home in your garden is not worth the extra few weeks of tomatoes.

### **What Tastes Good Together Grows Well Together**

Freshly picked bush beans—yellow wax beans and haricot vert—and new summer potatoes can be the ingredients of a great summer salad. Add some cherry tomatoes, a couple of handfuls of arugula, some olive oil, and salt. You will not be disappointed. When planted among potatoes, bush beans protect them from the Colorado potato beetle; in return, the potatoes help protect the bush beans from Mexican bean beetle.



### cOMpaniOn planting

The practice of placing plants next to each other in the garden so that one or both plants will benefit from the other is called companion planting. The technique has been a part of the organic grower's repertoire for years and is based on the idea that certain plants are mutually beneficial when planted next to each other. Some plants help each other by distracting unwanted pests —members of the allium or onion family do this for carrots. The pesky carrot fly can smell carrots in your garden from up to a mile away, but by planting spring onions or chives with your carrots they'll mask the carrot's smell and prevent carrot flies from being attracted to your garden. Radishes are another handy vegetable. The radish is said to enhance lettuce's flavor when grown by its side. This is a great example of the guideline "what tastes good together often grows well together." It's true!

### **Many classic food combinations are also good companion plantings for your garden:**

carrots and chives or scallions • tomatoes and basil • summer savory and green beans • lettuce and radishes • bush beans and potatoes

Companion planting also works for attracting pollinators and beneficial insects to certain plants in the garden. The radish flower is a great example. Plant a few radishes among your summer and winter squash and cucumbers

and ignore them. The radish will flower and the radish blooms will draw the pollinators to your squash—helping to ensure the squash flower gets its needed pollination. The radish flowers are delicious, too—just make sure you leave some for the bugs!

Some companion plants are used sacrificially: a garden version of a canary in a cave. Plant nasturtiums in the corners of annual-vegetable beds, allowing the vibrant blooms and full foliage to spill over its edges. These edible flowers are a fun, spicy addition to a salad, but they're even more valuable as the first line of defense against aphids. Like us, aphids just can't seem to pass by these lovely flowers. They are among the first plants aphids attack when they arrive in a garden and their sticky aphid bodies are easily seen on the large lily pad-shaped nasturtium leaves. You can then decide your best attack: either blast the pests with the garden hose or remove the plant entirely, disposing it, bugs and all, in the green waste bin that gets picked up by the city. Remember, you should not compost insect-infested plant material in your own bin because they will continue to live there and spread throughout your garden. Don't worry about losing the nasturtium; within weeks there will be another in its place—they are notorious selfsowers and grow very quickly.

As much as some plants benefit from each other, some should be kept apart. Certain plants are affected by the same diseases, in particular powdery mildew and blights. If you do not want to sacrifice a plant, it is not a good idea to plant your favorite rose and disease-susceptible prized pears next to each other because they increase each other's exposure to blights and pass them along to each other quite easily. Likewise, dahlias and squash both suffer from powdery mildew and will encourage it in each other if planted side by side. If you don't want to sacrifice either, give them space. Be observant—if you notice two plants struggling with the same pest or plant disease, don't double your trouble—plant them far apart!



Fall vineyards on fire with seasonal color are the perfect inspiration for a romantic table centerpiece. In addition to looking beautiful together, grapes and roses make smart companion plantings (as seen in many vineyards) because they are susceptible to the same types of diseases. Used as sacrificial plants, roses can serve as an early warning sign that the vineyard's prized grapes may be infected next. Create your own vineyard-inspired arrangement using a vintage urn and an assortment of grapevines and garden roses, trailing rosemary, pear branches, and, of course, some juicy grapes.

## Vineyard Pairing



Fruit-Tree Pruning

Harvesting fruit will be a lot easier if you keep the fruit trees at a reachable size—no taller than six to ten feet. A fruit tree may be able to grow up to fifteen feet or higher, but at that height it's much more difficult to harvest the fruit. It is up to you to keep your fruit trees at a manageable height, and this is easy to do with pruning. There are two types of fruit-tree pruning, named after the season in which they take place. Winter pruning is the time to correct shape and remove larger crossed and diseased branches. For fruit trees grown in home gardens, summer pruning is the more important of the two pruning seasons. Pruning in the summer suppresses growth and keeps trees from reaching full height. See the Resources at the end of the book for a source of more detailed information about various types of fruittree pruning.

## Organic Fertilizers

Organic compost is beneficial for meeting plants' nutritional needs, but using an additional more concentrated organic fertilizer can help get specific nutrients to the plant faster. Organic fertilizers are available at most nurseries and online (see Resources) and come in pellet and granule forms. Use a generalpurpose organic fertilizer for plants that do not have specific needs. For fruit trees, use a special fruit-tree mix and for acid-loving plants, like blueberries, use an acid mix.

Once any chance of frost has passed, help your perennial plants get a fresh start for spring with an application (follow the manufacturer's directions on the package) of organic fertilizer. Fertilize your plants according to their needs and then follow up throughout the growing season every month or so

as needed. Once October arrives and plants get ready for winter dormancy, give them one last application and then call it quits until the following spring.



The 'Chinotto' sour orange benefits from monthly citrus fertilizing.

Foliar feeding is an amazing fertilizing trick to have up your sleeve. Use a simple garden pump to spray the underside of plant leaves with a liquid fertilizer, which the plants will take up very quickly through small pores on the back of their leaves. While amending your soil with compost and fertilizers helps provide a steady, long-term food source for your plants, foliar feeding provides a quick punch of energy that can make all the difference in how your garden looks and produces over a long summer season.

Kelp spray is one of the best for foliar feeding. Derived from natural seaweed, it is an organic growth activator and, combined with nutrient-rich fish emulsion, helps plants grow full and healthy. It is available at most nurseries and there are also some great online sources (see Resources). We recommend spraying all your annual vegetables and many of your perennial shrubs, flowers, and fruit trees with kelp about once a month through their growing season. It is especially effective on container plants whose soil may have lost nutrients. If plants are looking a little peaked after a large growth spurt or the initial fruiting of their crops, or if they are starting to be bothered by pests and disease, supplement the foliar feeding with a top-dressing of

compost to the soil around the base of the plant to give it the extra boost it needs to keep producing and stay resilient.

Compost tea is also a great foliar feed, but because it does not have a long shelf life it is difficult to buy it commercially. However, you can make your own at home from your worm-bin castings or organic compost. See the Resources for information on making compost tea. Use it once a month during the growing season as you would a kelp spray. It feeds the plant digestible nutrients and also inoculates it and the surrounding area with a host of beneficial microorganisms that improve the health of the plant and the soil it grows in.

## reSourCeS

### Blogs

#### **101 Cookbooks**

[www.101cookbooks.com](http://www.101cookbooks.com)

Heidi Swanson's recipe journal, including natural foods and seasonal cooking.

#### **Civil eats**

[www.civileats.com](http://www.civileats.com)

A daily web news source for critical thought about the American food system and sustainable agriculture.

#### **DigginFood**

[www.diggingfood.com](http://www.diggingfood.com)

A vegetable garden and food blog by Willi Galloway that includes organic gardening tips, recipes, backyard chickens and coop information, and instructional gardening and cooking videos.

#### **Garden rant**

[www.gardenrant.com](http://www.gardenrant.com)

A blog on the world of gardening by four garden writers: Susan Harris, Elizabeth Licata, Michele Owens, and Amy Stewart.

#### **Hungry Ghost Food + Travel**

[www.hungryghostfoodandtravel.com](http://www.hungryghostfoodandtravel.com) Inspiring recipes and stories about local organic food.

#### **otter Farm**

[www.otterfarmblog.co.uk](http://www.otterfarmblog.co.uk)

Organic farmer Mark Diacono writes about growing food at Otter Farm, a pioneering organic smallholding in Devon, England.

#### **Sprouted Kitchen**

[www.sproutedkitchen.com](http://www.sproutedkitchen.com)

Recipe journal of seasonal, vegetarian, and whole foods.

### **... and our blog [Star Apple edible Gardens](#)**

[www.starappleediblegardens.com](http://www.starappleediblegardens.com) Garden photos from recent projects and our musings about growing food and creating beautiful spaces. Keep in touch!

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## **Books**

*The Art of the Kitchen Garden*, by Jan and Michael Gertley (Taunton, 1999)

*Carrots Love Tomatoes: Secrets of Companion Planting for Successful Gardening*, by Louise Riotte (Storey Publishing, 1975)

*Golden Gate Gardening*, by Pam Pierce (Sasquatch Books, 1998)

*Grow, Cook, Eat*, by Willie Galloway (Sasquatch Books, 2012)

*A Taste of the Unexpected*, by Mark

Diacono (Quadrille Publishing, 2010) *Tender: A Cook and His Vegetable Patch*, by Nigel Slater (Ten Speed Press, 2011) *Veg Patch: River Cottage Handbook No. 4*, by Mark Diacono (Bloomsbury, 2009)

*Western Garden Book of Edibles: The Complete A to Z Guide to Growing Your Own Vegetables, Herbs, and Fruits*, by the Editors of *Sunset Magazine* (Sunset Publishing, 2010)

## **Compost Bins, Worm Bins, and Organic Compost**

### **Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)**

PO Box 2209, 125 Clydesdale Court Grass Valley, CA 95945

(888) 784-1722

Compost bins, worm composting, organic compost, and instructional videos on composting.

### **Point Reyes Compost Company [www.prcompostco.com](http://www.prcompostco.com)**

PO Box 1082

Point Reyes, CA 94956

(415) 663-9497

Organic compost.

### **Star Apple edible + Fine Gardening [www.starappleediblegardens.com](http://www.starappleediblegardens.com) (510) 922-1258**

Custom compost bins.

## **Compost Tea**

### **Malibu Compost Company**

**Compost Tea Bags**

**[www.malibucompost.com](http://www.malibucompost.com)**

22631 Pacific Coast Highway #295 Malibu, CA 90265

(800) 282-6676

Biodynamic compost tea bags.

### **Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)**

PO Box 2209, 125 Clydesdale Court Grass Valley, CA 95945

(888) 784-1722  
Compost tea brewer.

## **Fruit Trees and Shrubs, and Fruit-Tree Pruning Information**

**Dave Wilson Nursery**  
[www.davewilson.com](http://www.davewilson.com)  
19701 Lake Road  
Hickman, CA 95323  
(800) 654-5854

Fruit-tree pruning information and a fruit-tree succession planting guide.

**Fedco Co-op Garden Supplies**  
[www.fedcoseeds.com](http://www.fedcoseeds.com)  
PO Box 520  
Waterville, ME 04903  
(207) 873-7333  
Bareroot fruit and nut trees, grapes, and berries.

**Four Winds Growers**  
[www.fourwindsgrowers.com](http://www.fourwindsgrowers.com)  
42186 Palm Avenue  
Fremont, CA 94539  
(877) 449-4637  
Citrus trees.

**Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply** [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)  
PO Box 2209, 125 Clydesdale Court Grass Valley, CA 95945  
(888) 784-1722  
Bareroot fruit and nut trees, grapes, and berries.

**Trees of Antiquity**  
[www.treesofantiquity.com](http://www.treesofantiquity.com)  
20 Wellsona Road  
Paso Robles, CA 93446  
(805) 467-9909  
Bareroot fruit and nut trees, grapes, and berries.

**Greywater Information** Greywater Action  
[www.greywateraction.org](http://www.greywateraction.org)  
**Organic Fertilizers, Kelp Spray, and Pest Control**

**Fedco Co-op Garden Supplies**  
[www.fedcoseeds.com](http://www.fedcoseeds.com)  
PO Box 520  
Waterville, ME 04903  
(207) 873-7333  
Organic fertilizers.

**Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply** [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)

PO Box 2209, 125 Clydesdale Court Grass Valley, CA 95945

(888) 784-1722

A wide selection of organic fertilizers, kelp sprays, and pest control options, including instructional videos on kelp spraying and integrated pest management.

## **Seeds and Bulbs**

**Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Co. [www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com)**

2278 Baker Creek Road

Mansfield, MO 65704

(417) 924-8917

Heirloom and organic vegetable and herb seeds.

**Fedco Co-op Garden Supplies**

[www.fedcoseeds.com](http://www.fedcoseeds.com)

PO Box 520

Waterville, ME 04903

(207) 873-7333

Heirloom and organic vegetable and herb seeds, crocus/saffron bulbs, garlic, and potato seeds.

**irish eyes Garden Seeds**

[www.irisheyegardenseeds.com](http://www.irisheyegardenseeds.com)

(509) 933-7150

Potato and vegetable seeds, asparagus crowns.

**Kitazawa Seed Company**

[www.kitazawaseed.com](http://www.kitazawaseed.com)

PO Box 13220

Oakland, CA 94661

(510) 595-1188

Asian vegetable seeds.

**The Living Seed Company**

[www.thelivingseedcompany.com](http://www.thelivingseedcompany.com) (415) 662-6855

Heirloom organic vegetable seeds.

**Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)**

PO Box 2209, 125 Clydesdale Court Grass Valley, CA 95945

(888) 784-1722

Heirloom and organic vegetable and herb seeds, garlic and potato seeds, and asparagus crowns.

**reneee's Garden Seed**

[www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com)

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Left to right: Stefani Bittner, Jill Rizzo, Alethea Harampolis, David Fenton, and Leslie Bennett.

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**For our mothers, Christine and Garna, our partners, Linval and Jay, and the next generation, Ana and Lauren.**

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