



Foodscapes - Front Yard Landscape Farming Harmony

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Why have we accepted the idea that a grass lawn should be the "standard" for your front yard? An expanse of fresh mown green lawn is beautiful, and walking barefoot in the grass is fun, but that expanse of turf requires time, energy, water and money to maintain, while giving only aesthetic pleasure in return. Instead of watering grass that needs mowing each week, you can water edible plants that give sustenance and save money, while adding beauty to your yard and neighborhood.

For your first attempt at edibles, you might want to try planting a container with nasturtiums and lettuce, tomatoes and basil, lettuce and organic pansies, or herbs with any type of annual flowers. To create a finished looked, use similarly styled pots and plant one common plant in each container.

Another idea is to plant edibles mixed in with your ornamentals. This is a landscaping technique called "foodscaping". This practice can be a little more challenging but can still be done in a stylish way. You can start by planting edibles in the border area only. Tuck fall vegetables such as kale, broccoli or cabbage, in the edging of your front yard along with asters and chrysanthemums for nice fall color. Also, gorgeous sweet peppers, dinosaur kale, flowering leeks and crimson strawberries can add color. Be sure to incorporate plants that have the same sun and water needs. Edges are a great place where you are not disturbing the root zone of any of your permanent plants, and it usually has easy access. It's an area you're likely to walk past every day, and it's easy to get a hose to it if things are dry. You'll notice when it's time to harvest, so that you don't waste as much food. Birds love the edge, which scientifically is called the ecotone, where one habitat meets another—the layered transition zones in the garden and in nature.

Edibles that will be on display in your front yard should bring more to the table than just good eating. They also have beautiful foliage, flowers, and fruit. Some edibles can also add a pleasing aroma, which often attracts pollinators while repelling unwelcome insect pests. Attractive foliage is readily available in plants such as kale, rhubarb, artichoke, chard, and lettuce. The flowers of nasturtiums, scarlet runner beans, and espaliered apples provide colorful blooms, while fruit such as tomatoes, eggplant, peppers (especially red ones), and blueberries provide additional interest.

While we usually think of growing vegetables in rows, try growing them in bunches or swales when using them in your landscape. Adding the striking foliage of leafy greens and/or orchard will add interest to your landscape. Leafy greens come in a variety of colors and textures. Look for varieties that are bolt resistant here in the valley. Chard is a taller green, so plant it as a backdrop for smaller plants. Eggplant, an elegant purple leaved, red stemmed plant, is so pretty it can be right at the front door! Peppers, tomatoes, and beans add a flush of color. Ornamental scarlet runner bean blossoms are a vivid pink and will enliven any area of the garden or container. Dwarf pomegranate is a delight in my garden. Consider the magical Pink Lemonade blueberry bush, or basil, Italian parsley or one of the many thymes, chives or peas. A determinate tomato will fruit all at the same time, then you can pull them out as soon as they are ripe. Cages or trellises are not required and a sprawling tomato plant with ripe red fruit can be a great ground cover. Whew! There is just no end to color and beauty within the edible world.

Don't forget the perennials! Globe artichoke adds dimension and has striking foliage along with interesting fruit that, if allowed to bloom, turns into a blue flower that attracts bees from miles around. Asparagus has long wispy, fern-like fronds, and rhubarb returns reliably year after year with elephant ear sized leaves beneath which scarlet stalks rise from the soil. Change out veggies each year and experiment with combinations that are most pleasing to your eye. Crop rotation helps keep the garden soil healthy. Depending upon the vegetable, change out crops seasonally. As one plant dies back, replant with a cool season vegetable. Include edible flowers that can be tucked in here and there to add dimension and interest and to keep your yard looking bountiful. The goal, after all, is to integrate the vegetable plants and herbs in such a way that they are simply seen as ornamental.

Allow some of your vegetables to bloom. Instead of yanking out the bolting broccoli, collards or dill, let them open their flowers to grateful bees, butterflies and other pollinators, for the good of the whole garden as well as your eyes.

Another place to consider is your parking strip. Pull out the lawn, remember not to spray with an herbicide, clean out rocks, add compost and design your mini-garden plan. Consider using low-growing plants in this area, such as herbs, radishes, or carrots, along with zucchini or squash.

Some communities and homeowners' associations restrict the amount of non-lawn space they allow in front yards. Before you dig, make sure that there are no regulations in your area that prevent you from having a front-yard vegetable garden. Fortunately, the tide is changing to allow for more creative use of front yards. It is now the policy of the state to promote and remove obstacles to community access to fresh fruit and vegetables, and to encourage the practice of homeowners growing food in their private yard space for personal use or for donation to others.

California New Civil Code Section 1940.10 provides some definitions:

- "Personal agriculture" means use of land where an individual cultivates edible plant crops for personal use or donation.
- "Plant crop" means any crop in its raw or natural state, which comes from a plant that will bear edible fruits or vegetables. It shall not include marijuana or any unlawful crops or substances.

You must admit there's not much that's "natural" about a front lawn. It's a monoculture that even though is rare in nature, is standard in most neighborhoods. Upgrading your front yard to a vegetable garden is sure to raise a few eyebrows, but if you do it right, you'll impress the skeptics.

What's old is new again!

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