



# Creating Space for Edibles in the Garden

In a time when it is becoming more difficult to find enough space and water to maintain both edible and ornamental plants in the garden, we have seen a move to different types of intensive gardening in an attempt to provide a long-term solution to the needs of the home gardener.

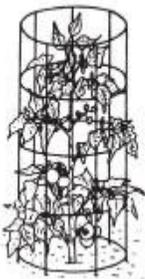
## Using Edible Plants as Ornamentals

Edibles can provide ornamental interest in the garden when used like any other annual or perennial. An early example of this was the use of ornamental kale as a bedding plant. However, lettuce, chard, spinach and mustard greens make wonderful ornamentals, creating colorful edging plants for beds. In addition, such perennials as artichokes, strawberries and rhubarb can provide interest as well as food year after year.

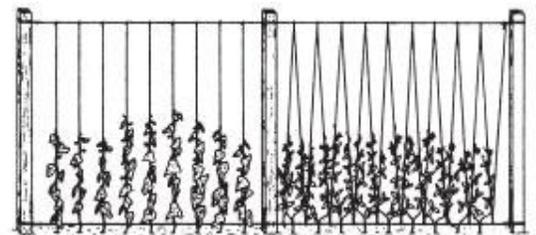
Growing edible and ornamental plants together in the garden is not a new idea. In fact, well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most home gardens were made up of vegetables and fruits mixed with herbs, with the few flowering plants used primarily to attract beneficial insects. The growth of the organic food industry and an interest in growing healthy food at home with limited space has brought a resurgence of this type of mixed gardening.

When space is limited or when it is difficult to locate an area conducive to growing fruits and vegetables (perhaps the only available space for a vegetable garden is in the shade), think about mixing your edible plants into the ornamental landscape. In addition to the plants noted above, tomatoes, beans, summer and winter squash, carrots and cabbage make wonderful additions to an ornamental garden. One benefit is the many beneficial insects your flowering plants will attract to help control some pests on your fruit and vegetable plants. Another idea is to use fruit trees to create shade in the garden or, if space is limited, consider using them as an espalier or to create an edible hedge.

## Vertical Gardening



Using trellises, arbors, nets, string, cages or poles to support plants is a great way to expand the usable space in a garden.



Plants such as cucumbers, tomatoes, melons, squashes, beans and peas are obvious candidates. Vegetables that in their natural state may tend to sprawl over the ground, can be grown vertically by providing them a support structure. Mixing them with ornamentals such as clematis and honeysuckle can provide both beauty and food. In addition to increasing the yield in the garden, vertical structures can be used to shade plants such as lettuce, spinach, celery and kale that require less sun during the hot summer months.

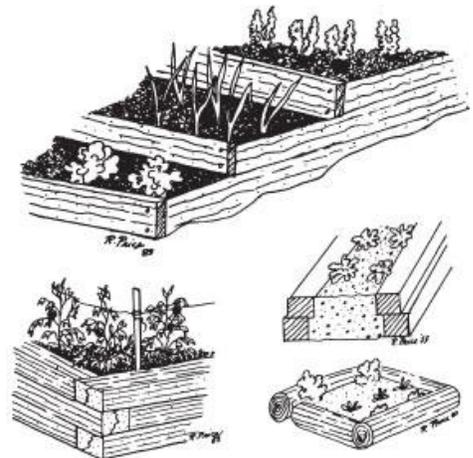
If space is at a premium, consider using a fence for vertical gardening. If it gets enough sunlight, you can string fishing line, weatherproof twine or netting on nails. Temporary fencing made of chicken wire or hardware cloth may also be used.

Edible plants also make great shade in the garden when planted on trellises, arbors and pergolas. Such plants as grapes and kiwi have traditionally been used to provide shade and beauty in the vertical garden. Consider using vining plants such as squash, cucumber or hops on a trellis to increase the planting space while providing shade and beauty in the garden. Because plants grown on a structure can dry out more quickly, you may need to water more frequently.

### **Raised Beds**

Raised beds allow the home gardener to concentrate soil preparation in a small area of the garden, resulting in the efficient use of soil amendments and an ideal environment for growing fruits and vegetables. Beds are generally 3' to 4' wide, allowing easy access on either side of the bed without risk of soil compaction.

Good soil preparation is key to successful gardening in raised beds. Gardeners can consider having their soil tested when starting out to determine what nutrients are needed. Yearly additions of organic matter to the soil will help replace the nutrients used by last year's fruits and vegetables. Be sure to till the soil so the top 10" to 12" is loose and suitable for planting.



### **Interplanting**

Growing two or more types of vegetables together in the same bed is a method of intensifying yield that has been practiced for thousands of years and is again becoming popular with gardeners in this country. However, successful interplanting depends on a gardener taking into account the length of each plant's growing period and growth pattern, as well as its light, nutrient and water requirements. It can be done by alternating rows in a bed, by mixing plants within the row, or by distributing several different types of

plants within the bed. See the Master Gardener handout on *Planning an Intensive Garden for more details*.

By mixing long-season (or slow-maturing) plants, such as carrots, with short-season (or faster-maturing) plants, such as radishes, a gardener can insure that the radishes have matured before the slower-growing carrots can be crowded out. Shade-tolerant plants such as lettuce can be planted next to taller sun-loving plants such as beans or corn.

Consider mixing vegetables with ornamentals as well to provide interest as well as nutrition from the garden. Strawberries make a wonderful groundcover or edging plant in the garden. Interplanting helps keep insect and disease problems under control. Most pests tend to prefer vegetables and fruits of one type or family, so mixing different plant types can reduce the damage caused by these pests. Mixing plants from different families often will give the gardener a bit more time to deal with a pest problem. And mixing ornamental plants with vegetables also helps keep beneficial insects where they're needed. Tagetes (marigolds) help attract beneficial insects to your tomatoes.

### **Succession or Relay Planting**

Succession planting, a great way to make the most of intensive gardens, *means* planting a new crop in the place vacated by a spent crop. For example, corn can be planted after peas are finished. Most gardeners do this naturally when they plant cool season crops (such as broccoli and peas) in early spring followed by warm season crops (such as tomatoes and peppers) in the summer, followed by cool season crops again for the fall and winter. Gardeners can get the most out of their succession gardens by starting seeds indoors; this allows the new crop to grow into transplant size before the existing crop has to be removed from the garden.

Relay planting consists of multiple planting of the same crop to provide a continuous harvest. This method isn't necessary with plants that naturally provide continuous yield such as tomatoes, squash and cucumbers. However, it is a great way to harvest such crops as lettuce, corn, cabbage, radish, beans, broccoli, onion, and greens throughout the year. The easiest method of relay planting is to sow seed for the same crop at 2-week intervals throughout the season. Another way to do it is to sow different varieties of the same crop (but with different maturity dates) at the same time. For example, sowing an early-, mid- and late-season corn at the same time will provide fresh corn for the whole summer. Whichever method is used, it is important to remember to recondition the soil with organic compost or fertilizers before planting new seeds or transplants.