



garden of eatin'

Don't look now, but spring is right around the corner. Time to start planning for a gorgeous yard that's also good enough to eat.

story by KEN WYSOCKY, WHITEFISH BAY, WISCONSIN

My yard is afflicted with seventh-grade-dance syndrome. You know what I mean: boys and girls awkwardly eyeing each other from opposite sides of a school gymnasium while a DJ plays the Black Eyed Peas' hit du jour. Substitute veggies and ornamental plants, neatly isolated in their respective beds, for the prepubescent parties and you get the picture.

Daylilies rubbing elbows with climbing green beans? Not on my watch! Yellow squash canoodling with nasturtiums on a trellis? The very thought! It's just not done. But as I learned from nationally known garden gurus Rosalind Creasy and Charlie Nardozzi, veggies and

ornamentals go together like Angelina and Brad. This flagrant act of garden "friending" even has a name: edible landscaping.

locavores, unite!

Charlie, an edible-landscaping expert with the National Gardening Association, and Rosalind, author of *Edible Landscaping*, point out that eating locally grown food reduces the transportation-chain carbon footprint. In other words, it takes less energy to get food to your table, and that also reduces exhaust emissions. Eating local saves you money, because homegrown produce is cheaper.

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—ROSALIND CREASY

And as any good grandmother will tell you, it tastes better and is more nutritious.

“You save money and resources. For example, you can get 230 individual servings of salad from 18 heads of lettuce,” Rosalind explains. “I can get \$700 worth of produce annually out of 100 square feet of garden.

“If I could get Americans to take out 100 square feet of lawn and replace it with edible landscaping, the world would be an infinitely better place on a hundred different levels. And if a million people did it, well, it could produce an astounding amount of food.”

Backyard produce can have a big impact on picky eaters, too. “When kids eat a bean they’ve grown, fresh out of the garden, they’re amazed at how good it tastes,” Charlie says. I know this to be true because my little guy, Johnny, age 7, eats climbing beans off the vine like they’re Skittles.

dig right in

So what about that nice established landscape you’ve created—probably at considerable expense? Not to worry. There’s no need for a scorched-earth makeover.

“You can integrate beautiful vegetables and herbs into existing beds without breaking the bank, or your back,” Charlie says. “Every year when you design a bed, consider putting in things like kale and Swiss chard, which has beautiful multicolored leaves.” One option: Bright Lights, an especially colorful Swiss chard variety.

Charlie also suggests removing shrubs that have grown too big or too close together—or that are generally ill-suited to their location—and replacing them with something you can harvest, he says.

For example, Rosalind says, you could replace a dwarf burning bush with a low-maintenance blueberry bush, which produces pretty white flowers in spring, burgundy foliage in fall, and berries that will wow your taste buds.

to-do list for newbies

1. START SMALL. “Don’t bite off more than you can chew,” Rosalind says. “Select easy Mediterranean herbs, which I call plants with training wheels.”

2. PLAN EARLY. Nurseries can’t always keep up with demand.

3. DO YOUR HOMEWORK. Select plants suitable for your climate and region. Consult your local extension service or a good regional gardening book.

4. PLANT THINGS YOU’LL EAT. It seems obvious, but surprising numbers of gardeners don’t do so. Test veggies at a farmers market.

5. BE REALISTIC. “Plants are like pets,” Rosalind says. “They enrich your life, but they require time and attention.”

6. THINK LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. Most edible plants require healthy soil, good drainage and six hours of midday sun.



top 10 PERFECT PAIRS

Not sure where to begin? Rosalind and Charlie suggest these tried-and-true plant combinations.

- ✓ red basil and golden-leafed pineapple sage
- ✓ collard greens and dwarf nasturtiums
- ✓ zucchini and sunflowers
- ✓ blueberry bush with sweet woodruff underneath
- ✓ currants and underplanted alpine strawberries
- ✓ Knuckle Head pumpkins and nasturtiums on a trellis
- ✓ climbing roses and blackberries
- ✓ zinnias beneath a trellis of cucumbers
- ✓ peppers and salvia
- ✓ eggplant amid marigolds



tastes great, looks great

An edible yard needn’t be a visual buzz kill, either, Charlie says. He travels all over the country to speak about edible gardening, and says people are always amazed by the examples in his slide show.

“You just have to put on your ornamental glasses,” he advises, and look at the edible plant as a shrub, tree or flower. “Summer squash and zucchini are good examples. They look more like tropical plants when integrated into a landscape.”

Rosalind adds: “You can use edible ornamentals in any style of landscaping anywhere in the world. Plus, there’s an intangible that people don’t factor in: quality of life. I pick blackberries in the morning and put them on my cereal. I give friends tomatoes and basil. It expands our humanity and enriches our lives, and the lives of others.”

And broadens your plants’ social network to boot.

save some coin by...

♦ **STARTING PLANTS** from seed.

♦ **GROWING VEGGIES** that are expensive at stores, like colorful bell peppers.

♦ **BEING A SHREWD SHOPPER.** Fruit trees and shrubs are cheaper if you buy them as bare-root plants. You’ll also save 10 percent on your tab if you order plants from nurseries before those items are stocked for retail purchase.

♦ **TRADING DIVISIONS** or baby seedlings with neighbors.

Visit www.rosalindcreasy.com and www.charlienardozzi.com for more good stuff from Rosalind and Charlie. To receive Charlie’s edible-landscaping e-newsletter, sponsored by the National Gardening Association, visit www.garden.org/ediblelandscaping.

