

Yard short of space? Try edible landscaping

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Homeowners who would like to try vegetable gardening but have little space available in their yards for the traditional garden plot need not despair. Edible landscaping may be the answer.

"Many fruit, berry and vegetable plants can be dual-purpose ornamentals," says Ray McNeilan of Gresham, an Oregon State University Extension home gardening agent. These plants can provide low-cost, fresh food and function as landscape ornamental plants at the same time."

Here are some examples of cool spring and summer season vegetables that can also serve as landscape plants.

Kale, a cool season vegetable plant is striking in front of evergreens, rhododendrons, or other large shrubs. Bunching onions can provide a dramatic background for early spring flowers. Other cool season vegetables that can double as landscape plants include parsley, thyme, rosemary and leeks. Leeks flower in spring and then re-seed themselves.

In mid-spring, many lettuce varieties, mint, rhubarb, lemon balm and carrots can be mixed in colorful combinations with flowers. Peas can be trellised as background.

These plants also go well with several types of spring flowering trees and shrubs. A blossoming apple tree with a bed of mixed lettuce and daffodils underneath is a good example, McNeilan says.

The list of summer season vegetables that can serve as landscaping plants includes red and green peppers and summer squash varieties with their mottled leaves. Asparagus, corn and sunflowers work well as backgrounds.

Many vegetables and herbs make especially useful fall ornamentals, he says, since their color and textures remain longer than most purely ornamental annuals.

Many types of cabbage, leaf lettuces, carrots, red-stemmed Swiss chard and flowering kale all turn a brighter color in colder weather. Leaf lettuce also makes good borders in the home landscape.

Several types of perennial plants can serve as both landscape and food-producing plants. Fruit trees provide summer shade, while many types of berry plants can make effective hedges and yard dividers.

Red and black raspberries, blackberries, Loganberries and blueberries can all be easily situated among other ornamentals. Strawberries, though low growing, make attractive ground covers or edging borders, the gardener points out.

Blueberry bushes are one of the best food-ornamental combination plants. They are especially useful with other acid-soil loving ornamentals, such as azaleas and rhododendrons.

Since blueberry bushes bloom early, they make a good background for early spring flowers. Their dark green foliage, bright fall leaves and striking red stems in the winter make them stand out all year. And, of course, blueberry produces a tasty fruit, which ripens in July adding purples and blues to any landscape.

"Any berry, fruit or nut plant should be chosen carefully," cautions McNeilan. "Make sure that the particular variety will fit your space requirements, is suited to the soil and climatic conditions, and is one that your family likes to eat. Many newer dwarf varieties allow even small yards to have a few fruit trees."

"Grape bearing vines are another edible landscape possibility," says McNeilan. "When attached to a trellis or

overhead structure they provide shade, privacy and in season, tasty grapes."

If available planting space is severely limited try container gardening. Kale is an attractive edible plant that can be grown in containers. Chard and tomatoes also grow well in containers and have attractive foliage.

Many types of dwarf fruit trees can be grown in a half-barrel or other type of large container.

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