



FINDING ROOM FOR A FEW EDIBLES

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Garden styles are changing. Edibles are in! Fortunately, it is easy to add a few herbs, onion sets or a tomato or two somewhere in your garden. Perennials such as hostas and grasses have joined foundation evergreens and this season it looks like edibles will turn up in beds and containers.

An added bonus to growing many edibles and aromatic herbs is that they attract beneficial insects and pollinators. It is important, however, to watch that you combine plants that have similar watering needs, sun and food requirements. Herbs that are invasive such as mint can be grown in containers either above ground or sunk into the ground.

Where should we look for room? Space can often be found around early and late blooming perennials. The early bloomers will be cut back and offer room for an expanding tomato or pepper plant. The late bloomers such as rudbeckias are slower to shoot out and won't mind sharing space with lettuce, green onions or radishes or garlic.

For folks with a background fence, consider rigging some string supports and planting pole beans or sugar snap peas. When you can eat the pod and the peas, you get a goodly amount of crop from just a few plants. Peas can be planted very close together and feed the soil while they grow. No fence? - try a "tepee" where peas will grow about 6 feet tall. Peas are planted early, pole beans need a soil temperature of about 50 degrees to germinate.

It is especially rewarding for children to be able to harvest some edibles from the garden and to take an interest in how things grow. The smallest child will enjoy eating cherry tomatoes and pulling onions can be fun as well.

Tomatoes are one of the most popular plants in the garden. They come in every size and now many shapes and colours. There are upwards of 750 tomato varieties registered and grown in North America. But unfortunately the varieties grown for grocery stores are chosen for shelf life and appearance rather than taste or flavour. If you are growing more than one variety, try to get one that is very early, one staking type that grows tall and produces until the snow flies and one that has tiny salad tomatoes. In the fall when the sun is lower in the sky, your tomatoes growing in a patio pot can be moved about to maximize sun hours.

Containers can increase your edible growing space and perhaps allow edibles to be grown closer to the kitchen. Chives and parsley are both a happy in pots and both grow in a goodly amount of shade.

Parsley doesn't transplant well so a pot of parsley can make a valuable house plant. Garlic chives is a taller sister plant of chives and has lovely white or pink flowers in late August. It can be used the same as regular chives.

'Cut-and-come' lettuce can be pot grown so that it is in full sun in early spring and moved to a cooler location in the heat of summer or moved closer to a convenient door. The dazzling colours of the new swiss chard can be stunning in any garden. Too big, well what about using it as the centre of a container and you can cut leaves from the sides of the plant the entire summer and keep it the size you want.

Sage and basil both combine well with perennials. Look for a purple Thai basil as the leaves are just as flavourful before as after flowering and the stunning pink flowers are edible as well as the leaves.

There is a new dwarf sage (10 inches) for rockeries or borders, plus golden sage, purple sage and my favourite tricolour sage. It is possible to pick sage leaves for kitchen use right up until the plant is covered with snow. The leaves are still aromatic and flavourful. When the snow arrives, snip off a few stalks to hang somewhere inside and use all winter. Richters lists some interesting ornamental sages from Mexico that would make great house plants at least the names sound fascinating, Raspberry Royale, Cherry Chief, etc.

Try to think outside the box. The bush varieties of zucchini or other summer squash can be grown up a trellis or atop a compost pile or the vining varieties can be used as ground cover. Mixing flowers, medicinal herbs and vegetables takes us back to monastic gardens in Medieval times. So experiment, save money, eat healthier and find out what works in your garden.

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