

**CARVER SCOTT EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERS****2017****ADDING EDIBLES TO THE LANDSCAPE****ADVANTAGES**

Reasons to add edibles to an existing landscape are as varied as the people living in them. Home-grown edibles are a great way to stretch the food budget, and incorporating fruits and vegetables here and there can ensure high-quality, local food that has received little, if any chemical spray. Flavors can be enhanced using home-grown herbs and nothing can beat the satisfaction of harvesting your first hand-raised food.

And to top it all off, many edible plants are every bit as ornamental as strictly decorative landscape plants.

GETTING STARTED

Most edible plants have several growing requirements in common. By keeping these basics in mind, you can find locations within the existing landscape that will fulfill plant needs and result in great food for you.

SOIL

The majority of plants prefer loamy, well-drained soil, with high amounts of organic matter. If you haven't already done so, obtain a soil-testing form at your local Extension Office or from www.soiltest.cfans.umn.edu/ and send in a sample for evaluation to the University of Minnesota Soil Testing Lab. The results will be returned within a couple weeks and will let you know your soil type along with the amendments needed to grow fruits or vegetables. All soils benefit from increased organic matter, so plan to start a compost pile (*see 1. Composting Guide*) to keep your newly enriched plantings alive and healthy.

OBSTACLES

Roots from existing trees and shrubs can interfere with your planting site by making it difficult to dig. Large trees may also compete with your plants for light, water, and nutrients. Some trees will allow a small amount of soil to be applied over part of their roots, but this practice can be very detrimental to others. A better option may be to grow the plants in containers set in the space under the tree. (*see 2. Will-fill-kill*)

Underground utility cables can be an issue, especially when planting trees and shrubs. Be sure to call Gopher State One Call at 1-800-454-0002 or 811 (*see 3. Below*) before planting. Also look out for overhead wires when planting anything that will grow taller than 8-10 feet.

Septic systems can also interfere with plantings, and should definitely be avoided as a growing location for anything edible.

SUNLIGHT

Almost all edible plants require 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight. If you are adding plants within existing landscape plantings, be sure to add the smaller plants on the south and west sides of the larger plants to guarantee enough direct sun.

WATER

Edible plants require regular watering during the hot summer months, with 1” of water per week as the gold standard for a good harvest. Be sure to locate thirsty plants close to a water source.

PROXIMITY

Some plants require regular tending and are best planted as close to your kitchen door as possible. A container of herbs outside the front door is much more likely to be used than one at the back of a long city lot.

Keeping these basics in mind, a quick glance around your property will often reveal several spots to tuck in edible ornamentals - even if it's just a container of lettuce on your balcony!

RESOURCES

1. www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/soils/backyard-composting-guide/
2. www.myminnesotawoods.umn.edu/2008/12/will-fill-kill/
3. www.gopherstateonecall.org/

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