

# Gardening Basics

## **Foodscaping: A Different Approach to Gardening**

By Kelli Bixler

In 2020, food banks around the country asked for additional donations of fresh produce to help those affected by the global pandemic. My fellow gardeners at the Flower Mound First Baptist Community Garden answered the call by filling every empty space in their garden with an edible plant. Following the model set at the community garden, I started filling empty spaces in my own ornamental flower beds with edible plants. The community garden set a donation record that year with the help of supplemental planting and donations from local vegetable gardeners (like me). I didn't know it at the time, but I was approaching gardening in a different way. I would soon discover that I was "foodscaping."

The term "foodscaping" simply means the incorporation of edibles into a traditional ornamental landscape (Arthur, 2017). Most homes have ornamental planting beds with spaces between flowers, shrubs, and trees. Those spaces provide perfect niches to incorporate edible plants into the landscape.

Foodscaping requires planning but can be easily accomplished. Using the steps below, you can create biodiversity in your landscape and create a healthier ecosystem in your garden. The bonus is that you can keep your ornamental palate in place while enjoying your own home-grown produce.



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### **Plan Your Garden**

Think about the vegetables and herbs you love. You should grow what you like to eat. Survey your landscape and identify where edible plants may fit in. Consider the size of your ornamentals compared to the sizes edible plants become when fully grown. For example, okra can grow to be 6 feet tall. You would want to plant okra at the rear of the garden bed. Observe sun or wind exposure in certain areas and decide if your selected plants could grow in that environment. Many people find it easier to draw or download a map of their property and insert images of edible plants comingling with ornamentals.

### **Work With your Own Space**

Foodscaping varies in every landscape. You may have many ornamental beds to develop or own pots and containers on a porch or balcony. Intermingling edible plants with ornamentals will create biodiversity in your garden (or on your porch) by adding a mixture of species. Planting edibles strategically between your perennials will camouflage dying vegetable plants and keep the landscape area looking pleasing at the end of the growing season. Be sure your garden has a foundation that will still look structured after your edible plants fade and die.

### **Prepare Your Soil**

Healthy plants come from healthy soil. Before planting season, consider getting a soil test through your county extension office. The outcome of the soil test will help you adjust the nutrients in the soil before adding edible plants. Next, incorporate a loose layer of compost or mulch into your garden beds. Adding nutrient-rich, organic matter to the soil each year is beneficial to both edible and ornamental plants. Loose, amended soil helps plants to absorb nutrients, use oxygen and stabilize root systems.

## Choose Your Edible Plants Sensibly

Envision what your edible plants will look like in the garden. Will they add to your color palate or envelop the entire garden space? If you have the space, vining edibles like pumpkins, squash, melons, or cucumbers can replace bare areas. Swiss chard or strawberries could add a pop of crimson to garden borders. Make a list of the vegetables, fruit, and herbs you want to cultivate. Investigate possible pests and diseases that affect them. If the plants you choose require more care than you want to give, choose an easier edible plant to grow. Gardening should be enjoyable, not a burden. The flexibility of foodscaping allows gardeners to choose plants that fit their needs. You can even skip a season if needed and still have a structured landscape.

## Use What You Have

You do not have to create new garden locations when foodscaping. Identify existing beds that get around six hours of sunlight a day. Entryways and porches can also be foodscaped with containers. You can use items that you already own, like wheelbarrows, crates, recycled pots, or barrels, to plant edible gardens. The plant diversity you create with foodscaping increases the presence of pollinators, suppresses weeds and decreases pests. Contrasting plants grown together can disrupt the ability of pests to find their host plants. Fewer pests will create a healthier ecosystem, which means less maintenance for you. Varied planting makes the landscape a more biodiverse habitat for insects, birds, butterflies, turtles, frogs, and mammals, as well. (Arthur, 2017).

## Experiment

Some edible plants will prefer particular spaces in your landscape. If a plant is unsuccessful in one spot, plant it in another spot the next growing season. Place edible plants that have similar water and sun requirements together for easier care. Most edible plants need full sun, but some will grow in part shade. Use your regional recommendations for planting, but experimentation will assist you in determining which plants thrive in certain locations.

## Just a Few Recommendations

Countless vegetables and herbs can be used in Foodscaping. Below are some of the standouts that numerous gardeners recommend.

Lettuce	Basil
Peanuts	Kale
Eggplant	Peppers
Okra	Swiss Chard
Onions	Radishes
Artichokes	Chives

And many more!

Foodscaping can make an immense impact on daily life. In addition to allowing growers to become less dependent on grocery stores for food, foodscaping also helps to enhance existing landscapes. Less fuel will be used with less driving to the store for produce. Habitats can be improved for plants and animals, and the biodiversity in gardens will be aided by planting edible plants beside ornamental plants. Perhaps foodscaping can provide sustenance to more local communities in need by utilizing existing growing spaces. Gardeners will discover a different approach to landscaping while foodscaping. Inspiration awaits.

## Resources

Arthur, Brie. (2017). *The Foodscaping Revolution*. St. Lynn's Press.

Beesley, Cheryl. (2015). *Landscaping with Edible Plants in Texas*. Texas A&M University Press.

Leander, Patty G. "*Edible Gardening*." *Texas Gardener Magazine*. [www.texasgardener.com/edible-gardening/](http://www.texasgardener.com/edible-gardening/)