



HOME HARVEST

A home vegetable garden can be a decorative feature as well as a source of healthy produce

Words: Amanda Elboz

Over the past few years in my work as a landscape designer I have noticed a definite resurgence in the popularity of the vegetable garden, with more and more clients asking that one be included in their garden designs. The impetus for this is three-fold: it's a response to people's increasing awareness of environmental issues; a yearning to have the convenience of fresh food at your fingertips; and a desire for families to educate their children about the importance of healthy, natural foods.

Veggie gardens close to home

It wasn't that long ago that veggie gardens were allocated to the far corner of the backyard where they were usually planted out in structured single rows, each row containing a different type of vegetable. In many cases, the plants were saturated in pest control chemicals, the variety of vegies was limited

— mainly the familiar standards such as potatoes, tomatoes, spinach, beans and some mint or parsley — and the veggie garden was tended by grandpa.

Today, edible gardens are located closer to the home (sometimes even in the front yard), they're the purview of the whole family and the variety of vegetables, fruit and herbs available to the home gardener is astounding — and far more exotic. And there has been another change: the beauty of many edible plants is now being appreciated, with produce gardens incorporated as design features in their own right.

Considering the beauty of so many of these plants and the fact that more people are cooking at home rather eating out, it makes sense to have edible garden beds as close to the house as possible. The convenience of stepping out the back door to grab fresh herbs and vegetables for dinner can't be beaten.





Of course, vegetable and herb gardens are now not only limited to the ground. They can be found in pots on apartment balconies, verandahs, kitchen windowsills and in courtyards.

Getting the location absolutely right

The most important element when designing a veggie garden is siting. The location must receive a minimum of four to six hours' sun a day. Once the site is determined, the fun of designing can begin. When designing a veggie garden, I like to choose a shape for the garden bed that complements the entire garden design. Vegetable gardens can be rectangular, square or curved — it's up to you.

While you do need to design it so all areas of the garden bed can be reached by the gardener, the bed can be flush to the ground or it might be more suitable to have a raised garden bed, particularly if the current soil requires a lot of improving. By raising the garden bed, this gives the gardener the chance to introduce a lot more organic matter. Another option is the no-dig style of garden (for more on this, turn to page 76).

Parterre vegetable gardens are stunning, but why not give this timeless style a modern twist. This can be achieved with the hard landscaping choices and shape of the parterre. Traditional box (*Buxus* sp.) hedges can be used to define the garden beds, however, alternatives such as rosemary, flat-leaf parsley or chives can be a great alternative for a less formal look.

Once the structure of the garden beds is defined, the inside planting can be softer and looser with plants spilling over each other and shooting over the top of one another. The inclusion of companion plants in this style of planting can assist in the control of garden pests.

Creating a decorative edible display

There are now many decorative features that can be made or bought for your vegetable garden. Many garden centres will sell ornamental growing frames for climbing vegetables such as peas and broad beans.

1. A planter made of recycled timber serves as a vegetable garden in this yard. Photo courtesy of Aesthetic Landscapes.
2. A growing frame made of seven bamboo canes with a decorative wooden finial. Photo courtesy of Heaven In Earth.
3. With the Pop-Up Herb Planter, lack of space is no barrier to growing fresh herbs. Photo courtesy of Garden Express.

PLANTING IN MARCH

- **Cabbages:** Transplant your late winter and spring cabbages this month or next.
- **Leaf vegetables:** This is your last chance to sow spinach as well as hardy Oriental leaves such as mizuna, mibuna and komatsuna.
- **Salad crops:** Sow winter lettuces and further batches of salads such as rocket, land cress, corn salad and coriander.
- **Onions and garlic:** Plant overwintering autumn onion sets and garlic cloves this month or next.
- **Evergreen fruit trees:** Container-grown macadamia, citrus, avocado and olives can be planted any time in spring or autumn.
- **Passionfruit:** These are available as grafted plants or seedlings. If you don't want suckering rootstock problems, choose a seedling.

Source: Vegie Patch by Alan Buckingham (published by Dorling Kindersley).

Or you can buy bamboo cane rods, form them into a teepee shape and then pop a decorative terracotta finial on top to dress things up a little.

Or why not place a striking ornament, or perhaps a potted feature plant, in the middle of the vegetable garden as a focal point? Remember, the size, shape and look of your edible garden is a matter of personal style and taste. Let your imagination go wild and have some fun.

With just a little planning and a dollop of creativity, your veggie garden or edible container garden can become a beautiful and decorative feature of your front yard, backyard, courtyard or balcony. Not to mention a contribution towards leading a more sustainable, carbon-footprint-reducing life. With an edible garden you can eat well, add life and colour to your garden and do your bit to combat climate change, so get outside and get planting. ■

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