

Edible Landscaping Chat Box Comments and Answers

Alyssa Ford Morel, instructor for the January 22, 2021 class on Edible Landscaping answers questions here that were asked in the chat box during the class. Alyssa also went back and answered in more detail questions that she felt needed further elaboration.

Amaranth:

Just an update - I said in the talk that Amaranth is nearly a complete protein, but I did a little checking and it looks like it is, in fact, complete, so even better. Try it and enjoy!

Animal Management Presentation Link:

<https://mgnv.org/living-with-wildlife-video/>

Balcony Gardens:

A question was asked about edibles on balcony gardens. Certainly there are balcony gardens that provide wonderful food and satisfaction for gardeners. Balcony gardening is pretty much container gardening with a few extra considerations. First, there is the question of light. A south or west facing balcony can generally be considered sunny. East and especially north facing balconies are generally considered shady, so if you are on the north side you need to look at plants that do well in pots AND in the shade.

Second, the question of how high up your balcony is can also be important. Some higher balconies get a lot of wind, so the pots need to be very sturdy and plants, especially tall ones, may need support. If the balcony is so high up that pollinators are scarce, you may also need to consider hand-pollinating to achieve good fruit-set of such vegetables as squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, etc. Here's a link for more information on hand pollinating:

<https://pueblo.extension.colostate.edu/hand-pollination/>.

If you are just starting out with balcony gardening, I suggest you begin with just a few pots and plants that don't need to be pollinated (some herbs and lettuces, for instance) to learn about your own balcony and see if it is visited by bees and other pollinators or if it is subject to high winds. Once you know what you are dealing with,

you can decide what else will work for you.

Biochar:

There was a question about using Biochar. Unfortunately neither Kirsten or I were familiar with Biochar. I've done a bit of digging about it and find it to be an interesting product, basically, a charcoal-like byproduct of pyrolysis, an anaerobic process. What seems most interesting to me is that its use as a soil amendment seems like it might yield positive results similar to those of ancient "Amazonian Dark Earths." BUT, and that's a big but, there's not a lot of documented studies or examples of this yet. So it's not something that I feel I can say is either good or bad to try. I will definitely keep an eye out for more information on biochar and if and how it might help build soil for the home gardener. Here's a link with some basic information and further links if you want to keep digging:

<https://extension.usu.edu/dirtiggersdigest/2018/what-is-biochar>

Companion Planting:

<http://chemung.cce.cornell.edu/resources/companion-planting>

Container Gardening:

If you want to know more about container gardening, Extension Master Gardener Anne Reed gave a great talk on container gardening last year: <https://mgnv.org/outdoor-container-gardening2020-video/>.

Cover Crops:

- <https://mgnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Best-Bets-Cover-Crops-1of2.pdf>
 - <https://mgnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Best-Bets-Cover-Crops-2of2.pdf>
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Gardening on Hills:

I verbally answered a question about gardening on a slope or hill, suggesting that some means of keeping water from running off is important, the most obvious of which is terracing in some manner. Unfortunately many edibles are not permanent plants that can anchor the soil, but there are many ways of creating a terrace-like

structure. In her Sustainable Landscaping class, Extension Master Gardener Amy Crumpton covers some examples of gardening on hills including using coir logs to create terraces. <https://mgnv.org/sustainable-landscaping-basics-video/>

Home Owners Associations:

In answer to a question about HOAs that want to control what gets planted in front yards, I mentioned a document called “Cues to Care” by Extension Master Gardener Elizabeth Gearin that deals with that topic in the context of native plants. Upon review, I feel most of the suggestions in that document are appropriate for edible landscaping also, and it is available at this link:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d76d70856d71978757182e7/t/5dcf03b52731126b748e9814/1573847990479/AAH_Cues-to-Care.pdf.

I would further add that each HOA is likely different. Some of the things I recommend is to:

- Familiarize yourself with what is and is not allowed within the current rules, and see how much can be done within that. Don't push for more until you have had some success and hit the limit of what can be done within the rules.
 - Introduce edibles in small amounts. Herbs are often easy to accept and so are edibles in attractive containers, especially when mixed with ornamental plants.
 - Build a relationship with whoever reviews and enforces the current rules. If there is a committee, can you approach the members either formally or informally about expanding the rules to accommodate what you want to do? Share photos of the sort of thing you are hoping to accomplish.
 - Try to join whatever the group is that is in charge of the rules, and influence from the inside.
 - Garden within the spirit of the rules, creating attractive, neat spaces that are well maintained so everyone sees your good intentions and commitment to being a good neighbor.
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Hosta:

Every time I teach a class, I learn something new. This time it was that fact that hostas are not only edible, but apparently popular in some Asian cuisines. The new shoots are said to be quite delicately flavored and the flowers have a peppery flavor. Thank you to the nice lady who pointed this out.

How Much to Plant:

A question was asked about planning for feeding a family. Here is a document that may help:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/files/Table%204.pdf>

Materials for Raised Beds:

There were questions about what materials were used for raised beds. I double-checked with the gardeners whose gardens I shared photos of, and several of them used cedar. Here are two links about materials for raised beds:

- <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/materials-building-raised-beds>
 - <https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1027-5>
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Onion Grass:

A question was asked if the ubiquitous lawn-weed known as onion grass is edible. The answer is yes, and the flavor is (no surprise) like an onion. However, the same as I cautioned related to eating dandelions, you need to be careful the lawn hasn't recently been chemically treated or visited by a neighborhood dog or other critter. Also, there is apparently another, similar looking weed not in the onion family that is toxic. So my advice is that if you want to eat small onions, plant some and eat the ones you thin out.

Passionflower:

The Passionflower I showed in my own garden is locally native, *Passiflora incarnata*, commonly called Maypop. There is a Tried and True Selection fact sheet here: <https://mgnv.org/plants/vines/passion-flower/>. It is a vine that likes to spread when it is happy, so be prepared for that or plant it in a space that has some sort of boundaries. It will benefit greatly from some sort of support. There are over 400 species in the *Passiflora* genus, all of them native to the Western Hemisphere.

Pawpaw:

In the illustration of a garden design, I included a Pawpaw, and sparked quite a bit of chat box conversation about it being alone. Indeed, for best fruit production, Pawpaws need a second plant that is not genetically identical for cross pollination.

Pawpaws like to spread by suckers, which are easy to propagate but are genetically identical to the parent and each other. While our example showed only one Pawpaw, to bear abundant fruit, a second Pawpaw should be planted somewhat nearby. It is important that if you are purchasing two Pawpaws you should ask the vendor if they are both suckers off the same plant, or possibly just purchase your two Pawpaws from different vendors. I recently planted a Pawpaw in my own shady back yard, and after explaining the situation to my friendly next door neighbor, and obtaining their permission, planted one in their back yard. Hopefully as the two trees mature we will each have some tasty fruit. Here's a Tried and True Selection fact sheet about Pawpaws: <https://mgnv.org/plants/trees/asimina-triloba-pawpaw/>

Plants to Keep Animals Away:

Someone in the chat was eager to know if there is a pepper or other plant to keep animals (specifically sheep, deer, hens and cattle) away from edibles. As I said in the talk, I am not an expert at keeping animals away, but I'm pretty sure that there is no pepper that, if planted, will keep animals away. Many of the hot peppers, if eaten by an animal, will be unpleasant and the animal won't eat more, but the theory of using hot peppers to keep animals away is to use the pepper to make a spray which is then sprayed on plants, making them taste unpleasantly hot and discouraging critters from eating more than their first bite. This theory works sometimes - with some animals -- as long as the pepper spray is relatively fresh. There are plants that would keep animals out of the garden by exclusion (the Trifoliate Orange I mentioned while talking about trees would likely accomplish that if planted densely around the growing area), but I am not aware of any plant with a smell that will keep a variety of animals away. Plants that have an unpleasant taste may not get eaten, but generally don't keep animals away from other nearby plants. For more on keeping animals away, see Kirsten Conrad's presentation Living With Wildlife Without Losing Your Garden.

<https://mgnv.org/living-with-wildlife-video/>

Ramps vs. Leeks:

While I was talking about edibles that grow in shady areas, I talked about ramps, the delicious wild allium that you can cultivate in your own yard. However, I somehow got confused and after a first correct reference, I referred to them as leeks. My apologies. Ramps and leeks are definitely different plants. I do know the difference, but some circuit in my brain switched out the word "leek" for "ramp." The rest of what I said applies to ramps, not leeks (which I correctly spoke about earlier saying they make nice cut flowers and are great in almost any soup.)

Squash Mentioned that Grows on a Fence or Trellis:

Tromboncino. And here is a link if you want to know more about it:

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/tromboncino-squash/>

Termite Control and Edibles:

A question was asked about planting edibles close to areas treated for termite control. I have done a fair amount of digging around, and have not come up with a definitive answer. There are a number of ways that homes are treated for termites, and a number of different chemicals, and the answer as to the safety of mixing edibles and termite control measures likely varies with each type of treatment and chemical used. As with any chemical use, Extension Master Gardeners recommend reading all labeled instructions and following them carefully. My recommendation is to speak with the company used to treat your home for termites, and ask them about interaction with edibles. If you are in a home and you are unsure about previous termite treatments, I would try to err on the side of safety and plant edibles where their roots are unlikely to reach the area you suspect of being previously treated.

Vegetables Grown on a Fence or Trellis:

For the questioner who was interested in growing vegetables vertically, here's link you may want to check out: <http://www.uvm.edu/pss/ppp/articles/vertgard.html>

Where the Gardens Shown are Located:

All the photos of "Local Example" gardens are in either Arlington or Alexandria Virginia.

Other links and resources listed in the Chat Box during the presentation:

- Recorded classes on Urban Agriculture:
<https://mgnv.org/reading-room/master-gardener-virtual-classroom>
- Monthly newsletter on vegetable and herb gardening "Between the Rows."
<https://mgnv.org/reading-room/vce-garden-guide/>
- University of Maryland Home Gardening Information Center:
<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic>