

# The Foodscape Revolution

“Garden to Table” is the best way to describe my passion for adding purpose to landscapes in suburban neighborhoods, office parks, school campuses and retirement communities. Cultivating food is more than a trend; it’s a tremendous opportunity for the greenhouse and landscape industries to meet a consumer desire that will not be going out of style.

Edibles enhance landscapes by providing a unique seasonal component with a multitude of health and economic benefits. Consumer interest in growing food is a unique opportunity for

the green industry to lead the way through education, production of plant material, design, installation and maintenance services.

Foodscapeing is simply the integration of edibles in a traditional ornamental landscape. This design strategy is meant to empower the green industry for generations to come. By connecting the expertise of growers and landscape professionals to the local, sustainable food movement, horticulture professionals are poised to play a critical part in the literal food chain.

Landscapes that present nutritional, ecological and aesthetic value meet the needs of the evolving market. I am not only referring to the sometimes sluggish “millennial age consumer.” Many baby boomers, like my parents, are retiring and downsizing. They are steering

away from large lawns, high-maintenance hedges and spray regiments.

What they are looking for now is “garden-landscape fusion” with fresh tomatoes alongside the boxwood hedge with a ground cover of fresh salad greens adjacent to the knock-out rose.

It’s important that as we nurture this emerging market we recognize that there are misconceptions revolving around how to grow food in modern landscapes. Many homeowners believe property values will go down with a rogue farmer on the cul de sac, hence restrictive homeowner association covenants. It is important to communicate and recognize that landscapes are not meant to be farms. Instead, the goal of a foodscape is to cultivate supplemental amounts of produce while meeting the aesthetic standards of the surrounding community.

Start by thinking outside the box. Lumber-encased beds are **not** the only way to grow food. In fact, these infamous raised beds are generally the cause for the “no food in the front yard” mantra of suburbia. Boxed beds can also cause decreased production due to over planting, which invites insects and disease to wreak havoc. Additionally, this method of containing edibles creates monocultures, as our food crops lack bio-diversity. In fact, four plant families make up the lion’s share of the edibles grown by Americans:

- Amaranthaceae - beets, quinoa, spinach and Swiss chard
- Brassicaceae - cool season crops such a broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and kale
- Fabaceae - beans, peas and peanuts
- Solanaceae - warm season crops like eggplant, peppers, potatoes and tomatoes

Education will lead to opportunity and there are many perennial edibles that can be included in the landscape. Fruit and nut trees offer long-term harvests, while herbaceous perennials such as asparagus and strawberries provide seasonal bounty and textural contrast. Herbs like oregano, rosemary and thyme are low-maintenance plants that add high culinary impact.

The inclusion of flashy annual crops like tomatoes, peppers, kale and chard will add brilliant colors that blend beauty and abundant harvest. Growers and retailers can shape the foodscapeing movement by offering interesting edibles including heirloom varieties and All-America Selections award-winning selections. With thousands of edibles to choose from, growers have the ability to promote a diverse collection of annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs, making every landscape a profitable opportunity.

Traditional field crops may be the ultimate gateway for the foodscape revolution. Seldom addressed in the local food movement, ancient grains are making waves, recently named “the next culinary obsession” according to the New York Times. From edible meadows to sophisticated spaces using clumps of oats, quinoa, rice, sorghum and wheat, grains offer low-maintenance requirements with a big design impact. They are essentially an ornamental grass with a nutritional benefit.

Sustainable management is the most critical component for a thriving foodscape. Consumers have created the value of organic produce and the demand for a “greener” approach to landscape maintenance is particularly strong with edibles. Successful plantings always start with healthy, living soil. Transitioning from hard chemistries and salt-based fertilizers in the landscape can seem overwhelming, but there are effective organic products and bio-control programs that can easily be applied to every landscape ensuring a safer world courtesy of the green industry services.

A newly emerging market revolves around the harvesting, processing and distribution of crops grown in professionally managed foodscapes. Commonly designed like a CSA, produce can be handled in a number of ways including weekly crop shares distributed to paying members. Another effective approach is partnering with local restaurants. Programs such as Ample Harvest can be used to donate produce directly to food banks serving the community.

As a professional horticulturist, I strive to meet the needs of a growing population and focus on ways to extend horticultural relevance in the American society. I am proud to see plants being recognized for all of the attributes they represent: beauty, ecology, health, wellness, nutrition and lifestyle. Foodscapeing is a design technique that embraces the heritage of home gardening while developing a new level of sophistication for modern day living. Green industry professionals are poised to become more essential than ever by designing, installing and maintaining foodscapes that will feed our communities in a sustainable way.

Consumer interest is there, let’s lead the way! [gpn](#)



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