

Edible Landscapes

Many generations before us lived off the fruits, nuts, berries, and herbs provided in the surrounding landscape. With a little thought and creativity the edible landscape of the past can be re-created in your yard, no matter what size, leaving an edible harvest of color, fragrance, interest, and delight throughout the years.

The edible landscape is an opportunity to bring native and fruiting plants in to your yard with lots of reward. To start with, like any good landscape, it is always best to create a plan. For those with established landscapes this may mean identifying existing plants in the yard that will be replaced with edible varieties over the years.

A good place to begin the planning process is choosing your fruit bearing trees. Northern Nevada's climate can support many fruiting tree species. There are more than a dozen varieties of apple trees that will thrive in our environment. Our area can also support cherries, plums, peaches, apricot, pear and other fruiting trees. Depending on the size and style of your yard, you may want to investigate dwarf varieties and espalier trees to fit the dimensions of your landscape. When choosing trees pick hardy varieties that bloom later in the season to give tree blossoms a chance to survive our occasional late season frost. Also, be sure to check if trees are "self-pollinating" or "need a pollinator" to ensure you take care of their pollination needs and have an abundant harvest of fruit on your trees.

One of northern Nevada's native trees, the Pinyon Pine, brings us delicious and hearty pine nuts in the fall season. These slow growing pine trees can be found dispersed over the rocky rugged foot hill terrain around Reno. These pines were historically used by the Native Americans mainly as a food source for the winter season as the nuts were roasted and eaten plain or even mashed into pine nut soup. Now these trees provide our landscape with a glimpse of green in the winter months. They can be difficult to transplant and grow but can still be found in some nurseries in our area and make a nice addition to a northern Nevada edible landscape.

Grapes are becoming more common in our area as many varieties enjoy our cool dry climate. They are beginning to flourish around town and can be seen growing in residential and commercial landscapes in greater Reno-Tahoe. The first step in choosing grapes is deciding between table grape and wine varieties. They two varieties have very different characteristics and if it is your intention to use your grapes for wine you will want to make sure you chose the right variety. The grape vines can be placed around the posts of a trellis or placed orchard style draped over rows of single set posts.

With many edible plant options left it's time to consider shrubs that will begin to transform the landscape into mouth watering sight. Let's consider the addition of berries. For berries choose from native currants, elderberries, serviceberries, and accent with tasty strawberries and raspberries to mention a few. These delightful plants will provide flavorful fruits that can be eaten plain, made into jellies, jarred and even used for pies.

There are many flowers in our landscape that are not only beautiful but edible. One of the more commonly seen around northern Nevada yards is the daylily (*Hemerocallis* spp.). The flowers are edible and can be used to dress up salads or placed on top of other dishes to add vibrant color and interest. The same goes for rose petals and a variety of other flowering annual and perennial plants. It's best to speak with informed nursery personnel when choosing or deciding which plants may be edible.

There are many varieties of plants and trees that grow here that can provide edible material whether it is fruit, flowers, leaves, or roots. Always check with a knowledgeable professional before assuming something can be consumed. There are many books that can also be found on this topic; check your local nursery's plant information center or books for sale. Information can also be found on-line.

It is important to protect the plants in your yard that you plan on eating from chemical sprays, animal wastes and other contaminants during the growing process. You don't want to chance eating harmful sprays that may be left on your plants. Be sure to always thoroughly wash an items picked from your yard to make sure they are clean before eating.

Creating an edible landscape is a fun and fulfilling task that can turn your backyard into a palette of gourmet tastes and colors. Take the time to discover the many wonderful trees, plants, and flowers that our area supports and have fun creating your own edible landscape design.