

# ornamedibles – A REVOLUTION

Asking your customers the right questions will position them to grow the right garden for their vegetable needs and wants.

The utilitarian days of having the edible plants tucked away behind a walled or fenced off location, hidden from view are long gone. The landscape for a gardener who also happens to want beautiful gardens where fruits and vegetables are valued for their beauty and production value is growing rapidly. Ornamentally beautiful plants + edibles = ornamedibles.

We have websites like Pinterest and Houzz.com to provide oodles of non-stop, beautiful and inspiring ideas, and the public is eating it up! In fact, it's almost a trendy status symbol for the new high-tech exposed gardeners to show off their penchant for growing edibles to their friends and neighbors in a delicious game of "Who grows, preserves, cans, creates recipes for and donates more home-grown loveliness than their friends" contest. However, they most emphatically want it to be beautiful too.

If it means that young parents are also motivated to wrangle a child's enthusiasm for where a tomato comes from and it turns it into a passion for how a garden comes to life, then more power to the movement! WE owe them the gift of understanding where food comes from and the nursery professionals have a huge opportunity to relate this goal to a visually pleasing and functional landscape at the same time.

Edibles in the landscape ought to be as beautiful, tidy and aesthetically pleasing as possible for this idea to work well as a sales tool, and this is where the helpful designers and skilled sales people in an independent garden center are critical. There is simply no reason red salvia can't be planted near some gorgeous purple eggplants. Why can't a blueberry shrub be snuggled up with some luscious, bold petunias? Or pink Swiss chard with pink roses? As long as growing conditions are compatible and growth habits are harmonious, there is nothing to lose by pairing a lantana with a potato.

## Edible Inquiries

Here is an idea geared for young families: Have an art contest for the kids to draw their "Dream Veggie/Flower Garden" and post the drawings for the public to vote! Or create a coloring page where they can add to an existing drawing.

Here is an idea for the adult crowd too! Infusing liquors and growing edibles for all kinds



## Beautiful Plants + Edibles = Ornamedibles

of cocktails is very popular too — look at Amy Stewart's new book on the New York Times best seller list titled "The Drunken Botanist" for ideas. There is even a plant line from Log House Plants grown specifically for it!

How can IGCs, designers and landscapers participate in this movement to build relationships and partner with customers who want to grow beautiful edibles combined with beautiful landscapes?

Start by asking great questions:

1. Create realistic expectations – Not all edibles are pretty year-round. What area is a reasonable amount of space to start integrating this idea first? Front yard? Back yard? Side yard?
2. What do you like to eat?
3. How much time would you like to devote to maintenance?
4. Is having enough to share important to you? Become a drop-off location for the extra food for donation to the local Food Bank; it shows that you are a partner in the community too!

5. Do you know your soil and light conditions? Seasonal trade out of various edibles would be a wonderful class, titled "Succession Planting." You can also create plant grouping specifically for shade, drought tolerant, etc.

6. Are you planning on edibles in raised beds, containers or blended into the landscape? Accessibility for handicapped people is a wonderful topic idea to add to your events.

7. Are there grandparents who might want to be involved? This is a fantastic multi-generational idea for parents with limited time. Grandparents are also frequently looking for activities when they are watching little ones, and the independent garden center is in a unique position to offer activities that cater to them.

8. Is lack of space a concern? Small-space and container gardeners are eager to grow edibles and ornamentals too; show them how with great display containers that include gorgeous flowers and edibles for a balcony or small patio. Include ideas like edibles growing up a trellis or twigs from the garden with flowers and herbs below.

9. Have you offered themed food events to introduce newer gardeners to the array of edibles they can grow with ornamental plants? Fruit and veggie tastings are a hit across the country to expose customers to all of the new varieties of tomatoes, blueberries and any number of edibles, herbs, etc., they can try.

10. Is affordability and sustainability a concern for you? Using all kinds of recycled containers is hot right now for growing edibles and ornamentals. Create a Pinterest Board for your customers to upload their pictures of recycled container growing and show it on a slideshow loop in the garden center. **LGR**



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