

A New Wave of Edibles

These trends in hydroponics, edible décor, colors and flavors are critical in taking your edibles department to the next level.

By Cheni Filios

No matter where you live, there's something special about harvesting homegrown vegetables — and customers are still responding to the edibles department. Help take it to the next level by adding assortments of texture and color, and indoor and outdoor options, to liven up your customers' gardens and their dinner plates.

What's still so special about edibles? There is a great sense of accomplishment and joy that comes from growing your own food, which contrasts the demands of our high-speed pace of life. It brings a sense of calm and serenity into the home.

At PanAmerican Seed we are seeing a wave of edibles in indoor and outdoor design, from hydroponics to tabletop decoration. In addition, the blending of edibles and ornamentals brings exciting global flavors from the backyard to the table.

Hydroponics

Hydroponic growing is trending. From commercial food production to the home gardener, everyone wants to get their hands wet.

Do-it-yourself websites are exploding with ideas on how to build your own hydroponic systems, retailers are marketing complete at-home systems, and there are thousands of how-to videos available for consumers to learn to sow, maintain and harvest using hydroponics.

There are many challenges to growing hydroponically, starting with the proper quantity of seeds in each pot and achieving uniform germination.

Multi-seed pellets are a great way to start hydroponic plugs, taking the guesswork out of sowing. Salad mixes are fast to grow and offer great color, flavor and texture combinations.

Dinner is easy with a single harvest from a hydroponic salad mix.

SimplyHerbs 'Try Basil' is a multi-seed precision pellet formulated with three varieties of basil:



SimplySalad 'Kale Storm'



Pepper 'Candy Cane Red'



Pepper Snack series

Genovese, Purple and Serrated. It creates an instant mix of color and texture in one pellet, perfect for the herb connoisseur.

SimplySalad multi-pellets provide colorful, mixed-texture salads in an easy-to-sow multi-seed form. Salad mixes range from multi-color lettuce in 'City Garden' to smoothie-perfect kale mix in 'Kale Storm'.

Edible Décor — Indoors and Out

From seasonal décor to tabletop decorations, potted plants bring rich color and unique contrast to indoor spaces. When you add edible plants to the mix, the design options are endless.

A quick tip: When prepping tabletop decorations with edibles for special occasions, it's best to leave plants in a sunny window until the day of the event as most edibles can only tolerate low light levels for a few days at a time.

Do your customers have a small outdoor space? No excuse for living without edible decor!

Whether growing in pots, raised beds or in-ground, there are tons of options for small-space growing. Look for keywords like "dwarf," "short-vine," "restricted-growth" or "compact" when selecting varieties, which are less likely to overtake a garden or patio.

Be sure to pay close attention to approximate finish plant size when choosing containers for vegetables. If the container is too small or too large, it's likely the plant will not reach maximum fruit production.

Edible and ornamental combos are a functional and fashionable way to save space and bring color into outdoor décor.

When selecting ornamentals and edibles for combinations, look for plants that perform well in containers; varieties bred for in-ground performance are often too vigorous for

combinations. Try to match plant vigor: A very vigorous tomato will likely outcompete a compact marigold, and similarly a spreading petunia may overtake a standard basil before you get a chance to harvest.

Moisture management is key for successful combinations.

Woody perennial herbs such as rosemary, sage, thyme and oregano pair best with ornamentals that prefer low media moisture. Fruiting vegetables perform best with medium-to high-moisture and fertility, similar to many ornamental annuals and herbs such as basil, dill, cilantro and parsley.

To maximize harvest potential, aim for one tomato, pepper or eggplant per container. If there are too many fruiting vegetables in a mix, the fruit yield and quality will decrease. Lastly, fruiting vegetables and herbs will perform best throughout the season if fruit is harvested regularly and herbs are trimmed back to encourage new growth so don't forget to harvest.

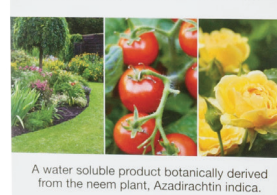
Pepper 'Macho' packs a lot of punch in a small package, lighting up your table with its bright red fruit, which are a great spicy addition to any dish. 'Macho' grows well in a 3 1/2- to 4-inch pots and tops out at 6 inches — the perfect height for an unobstructed view of your dining companions across the table.

For 6-inch patio containers try the Snack series of sweet pepper. These will provide a range of bright-colored fruit throughout the summer, perfect for snacking right off the deck or bringing into the kitchen to incorporate into favorite summer dishes.

Flower, herb and vegetable combinations come to life in Plug & Play Premium Annual Combinations like 'Italian Bistro', which includes

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CONSUMER TRENDS

spreading petunia 'Easy Wave Red Velour', tomato 'Little Napoli' and SimplyHerbs Curled Parsley. Plug & Play Combinations are selected after multiple years of trialing in a variety of outdoor environments to ensure that ingredients blend throughout the growing season.

Exotic Colors and Flavors

Everyone is excited to go on a culinary adventure no matter if you're a road warrior, restaurant connoisseur, avid reader or television junkie.

We continue to learn about amazing colors, textures, flavors and plant habits throughout the world. And with the help of seed savers and plant

breeders we are now able to grow a huge variety of edible plants in our own backyards.

From tomatoes with deep purple skin due to accumulation of anthocyanin pigment when exposed to the sun to edible peppers with beautiful stripes in the fruit and foliage, when it comes to amazing edible plant diversity, the sky's the limit!

Just remember when introducing a new crop to your portfolio, do your research on invasive species and be cognizant of the potential impact to your local ecosystem.

As horticulturists, we are gatekeepers of new plant introductions and it is our responsibility to be good stewards to the land we live on.

Shoppers looking to expand their vegetable garden to try new things will have plenty to be excited about for 2018.

'Mad Hatter' is a sweet pepper with a unique three-sided shape. It's definitely a conversation starter on an appetizer plate when stuffed with cheese or sliced on a salad.

'Aji Rico' is a hot pepper with a warm heat level, which is perfect for fresh eating or cooking into salsa and hot sauce.

These peppers are from the *Capsicum baccatum* species with a center of origin in South America. Baccatum species of peppers are commonly used in Bolivian and Peruvian cuisine. The fruit has a crisp thin wall with a refreshing, citrus and floral flavor. Pepper 'Mad Hatter' and 'Aji Rico' are also All-America Selections National Winners for 2017.

A perfect marriage of edible and ornamental, new 'Candy Cane Red' is the first-of-its-kind sweet striped pepper. Perfect for growing in a 12-inch patio container or in-ground, the green and white striped fruit will mature to red and are sweet and crisp at any stage of harvest. The foliage is variegated for extra WOW in the landscape. 'Candy Cane Red' is sure to be a crowd pleaser in the garden and on the dining table.



Pepper 'Mad Hatter'



Pepper 'Aji Rico'

'Midnight Snack' is an indeterminate tomato that produces loads of beautiful red cherry tomatoes that develop a glossy-black overlay when exposed to sunlight due to accumulation of anthocyanin pigments in the skin. This unique color and great flavor tomato is a perfect way to get kids to

eat their vegetables and a guilt-free snack any time, day or night. 'Midnight Snack' is also an All-America Selections National Award winner for 2017.

So indoors or out, big space or small, there is no excuse: Gardening with edibles is a perfect way for your shoppers to tie together seasonal décor, provide nutritious and fresh hydroponic food year-round, add color and texture to their patios and bring global flavors from the backyard to the dinner table.

Take note of these trends and recommendations and keep the excitement alive in your edibles department. **LGR**

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