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the incredible, edible fruitscape

BY NANCY MANN JACKSON



When they're ready for a snack on a late summer afternoon, my boys, ages 3 and 5, like nothing better than to walk down the hill to our neighbors' property, where a row of apple trees stands bulging with fruit. The neighbors, whose children have grown and gone, have told our boys they can have as many apples as they like, and so it's become a favorite event to pluck them from the low-hanging branches and crunch into them right there in the yard, savoring the warm, earthy and sweet or sour taste of apples picked with your own hands.

For years, apple trees, berry bushes and other fruit-bearing plants belonged only in orchards or gardens, and the front lawn or backyard was reserved for flowering plants and shrubs. But fruiting plants offer more than

delicious fruits, they also can be lovely to look at. Growing numbers of homeowners are choosing to incorporate fruit-bearing plants into their landscape designs, getting both aesthetic enjoyment and physical nourishment from the same plant.

In his book, *Landscaping with Fruit* (Storey Publishing, 2009), Lee Reich says growing fruit is like "having your cake and eating it, too." He believes that it's time we appreciate the beauty of many fruiting plants and incorporate them into ornamental landscapes in intentional ways, such as using strawberries as ground cover or blueberry bushes as hedges. On the flip side, Reich also says that many plants traditionally grown as ornamentals, such as Juneberry, actually have "great-tasting" fruits, and we should be enjoying them with our taste buds as well as our eyes.





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Deciding to Grow Fruit

Two years ago, Julie Parrish and her family made the switch to an edible landscape at their home in West Linn, Ore. Rather than just adding a few fruit trees, the Parrishes did a full-scale landscape renovation. They removed 12-foot hedges that wrapped a large portion of their 1/3-acre property, along with 12 to 15 pine trees, assorted decorative trees and lots of rhododendrons. In their place, the family planted eight apple trees of different types, a pear tree, a peach tree, a cherry tree, an almond tree, a pair of kiwi vines, a grapevine, raspberries, 15 huckleberry bushes, 10 lingonberry bushes, a small strawberry patch, 45 blueberry bushes of assorted types and 12 raised beds for other produce, mainly vegetables. "Our lot was really overgrown when we bought the house," Parrish says. "And we figured, if we're going to have to do yard work, we might as well be tending to something that was going to be productive instead of just clipping and trimming hedges that were just waste."

The first year the plants were in the ground, Parrish harvested apples and blueberries from her yard. The second year, her family got about 40 pounds of berries and 50 pounds of apples and pears. "When the trees reach maturity, well, I haven't yet figured out what to do with 800 pounds of berries and a few hundred pounds of apples and pears each year," she says. "But we're thrilled with what we've done."

Like the Parrish family, families are choosing to incorporate fruits into their landscapes for a variety of reasons. According to Ed Bemis of Bemis Farms Nursery in Spencer, Mass., families are attempting to grow their own fruits for the same reasons more people are growing their own vegetables: to have control over their food sources, to

Top: Juneberry, traditionally used as an ornamental, actually has great-tasting fruit, as well.

Bottom: Fruiting plants can add the look, texture and color needed to make your yard a masterpiece.



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Mrs. Bemis' Strawberry Shortcake

"This is the recipe that got my wife in trouble with her mother. My wife grew up in Pennsylvania. We met in college—both plant majors, of course—and she moved to my hometown in Massachusetts. Before we were married 24 years ago, my wife lived with my parents for a while. My mother, Marge, made this strawberry shortcake recipe, which was so good it prompted my wife to tell her mom that Marge made the best dessert she had ever had. Never tell your mother—who cooked for you for 18 years—that your mother-in-law-to-be makes the best dessert you have ever tasted. Never a good idea! It is a very rich, scone-like biscuit, great for any special occasion, such as your first strawberry harvest." —Ed Bemis, Bemis Farms Nursery, Spencer, Mass.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 2 cups flour
- 1 to 2 T. sugar
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 4 T. very cold butter
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup cream or milk
- 1 1/2 quarts fresh garden-ripe strawberries
- 1/2 cup sugar

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.

Thoroughly blend first four ingredients. Slice butter into eighths and cut into the flour mixture, using a food processor or pastry blender, until pieces are the size of small peas. Add eggs and cream; mix until blended.

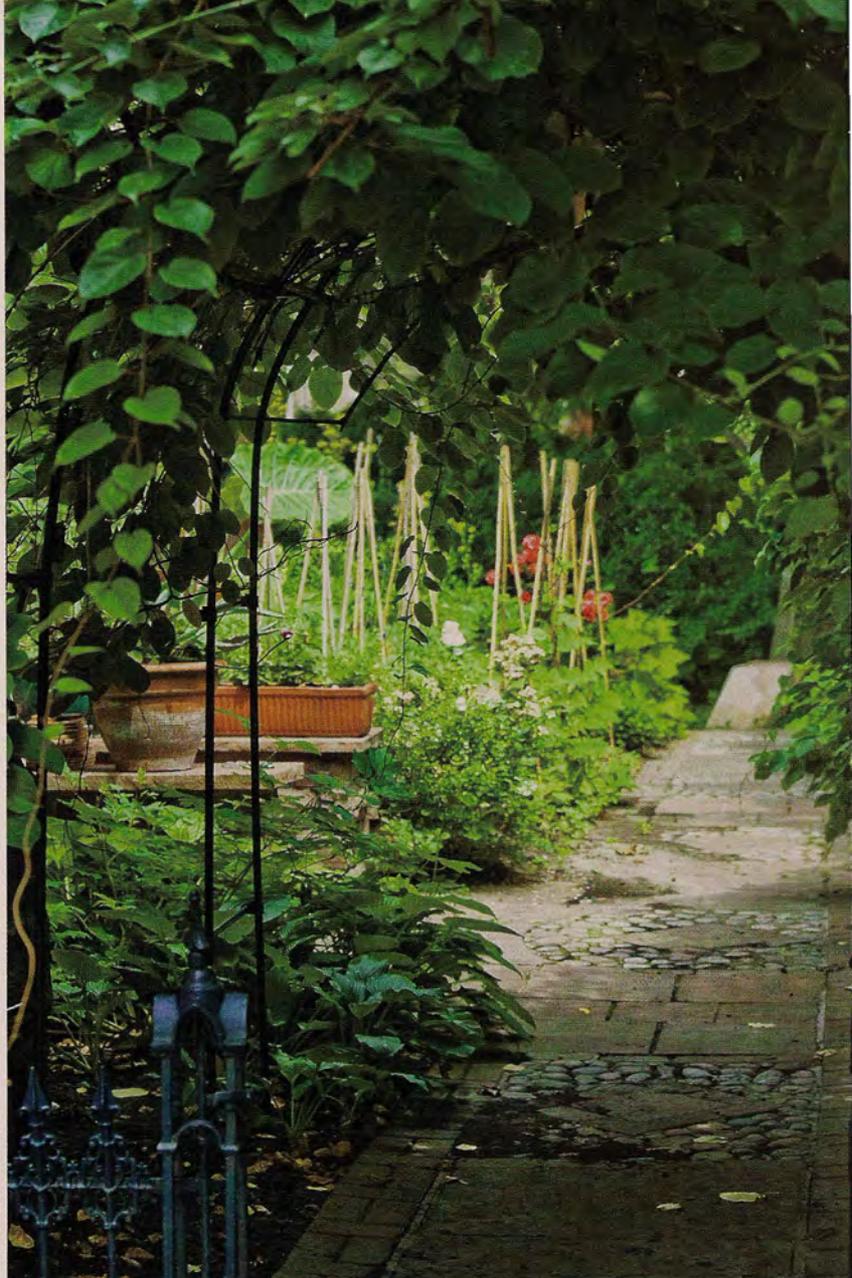
Knead on lightly floured board for 1 minute. Roll or pat to 1/2-inch thick. Cut into desired sizes and shapes.

Bake for 15 minutes, until light golden brown.

Slice strawberries into a large bowl. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup (or more to taste) sugar. Serve with whipped cream, vanilla ice cream, or both.

Serves up to 12.

RHODA PEACHER



LAURA BERMAN/GREENHOUSE

ensure that they're eating wholesome fruits, to save money, to live a little greener and to create family time. "It is an amazing experience to see a child's eyes light up the first time they taste a peach fresh off the tree with the sweet, warm juice dribbling down their chin," Bemis says. "And bringing some fresh, red, ripe strawberries to share at work gives one a healthy high that lasts for a long time."

Grapevines and hardy kiwi make gorgeous arbors.

Choosing the Right Plants

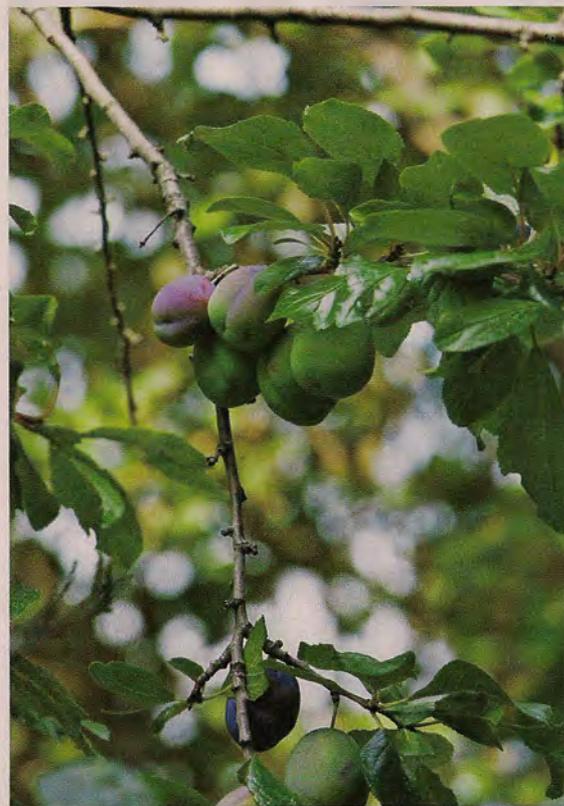
If you want to plant fruit in your yard, the first decision to make is which fruits you'll grow. There are several criteria to consider before you decide.

TASTE. Think first about what kinds of fruit you and your family will eat. Chris McLaughlin, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Composting* (Alpha/Penguin, May 2010), talked with her kids and her husband about what they would actually eat before planting apple trees, an orange tree, strawberries and blueberries in her yard.

When you plant fruits you and your family enjoy eating, they can become not just healthy snacks, but also idea generators for daily menu planning. "I love walking out of my



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NANCY MANN JACSON

Clockwise: Apple trees are an appealing addition to any landscape.

Plums have lovely blossoms but rank lower on the "Luscious Landscape Index" because they require annual pruning and often have pest problems.

Make sure your planting area is weed-free and the soil is ready to foster fruit growth.

kitchen, across the patio, and grabbing whatever is ripe to inspire me for preparing our next meal," says Stella Otto, author of *The Backyard Orchardist* (Ottographics, 1995) and *The Backyard Berry Book* (Ottographics, May 2010).

BUDGET. Not only are homegrown fruits good to eat, but they can save you money. In addition to choosing fruits your family will eat, think about the fruits that put the biggest dent in your wallet when you buy them at the store. Parrish says she would have to pay \$2.99 per pound for some of the apples. Asian pears and blueberries her sons love to eat. After the first two years with an edible landscape, "the trees have almost paid for themselves," she says. "And this year, we'll actually be profitable on the trees."

Otto says she doesn't just save money, especially on the higher-value berries; growing her own fruit also allows her family to enjoy types and varieties that she can't even find at the store, such as yellow and black strawberries, day-neutral currants, American persimmons, and pawpaws.

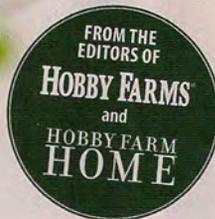
CLIMATE. Before planting anything, make sure the fruits you've chosen will thrive in your area. The best way to determine which fruits are best-suited to your climate is to contact your local county extension agent. Each office can usually provide pamphlets or online information about crops recommended in your area.

The extension agent who works in your county can also answer your questions about growing fruit and combating common pests.

APPEARANCE. "Not every fruit grows on a beautiful tree, shrub or vine," Reich says. If you're truly interested in incorporating fruit into an appealing landscape plan, consider how each plant will look, and how it will add to the balance of your landscape. Designing a yard can be a form of artistry, and if you choose the right ones, fruiting plants can add the lines, textures and colors that make your lawn a masterpiece.

For instance, grapevines and hardy kiwi can make beautiful arbors, and espaliered pear trees can provide privacy in a much prettier way than a fence or a traditional hedge. And both provide yummy snacking.

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~ Cicero

Roman statesman/philosopher

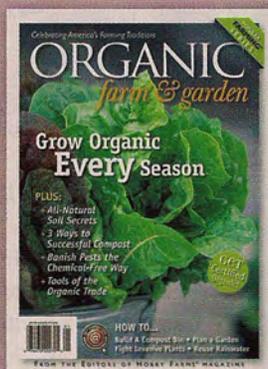
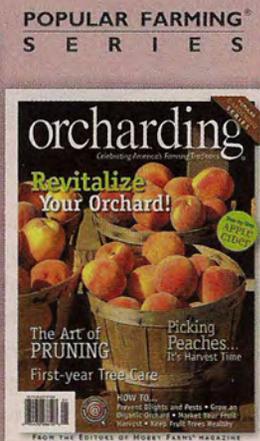
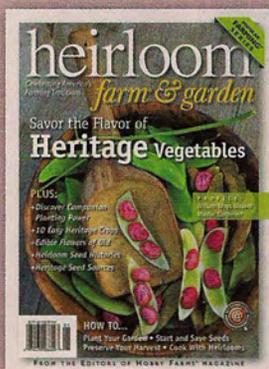
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lished, they will yield fruit year after year. But in the beginning, expect a little more work.

“Proper site preparation is one of the keys to a successful fruit garden,” Otto says. “Make sure the site is weed-free and the soil nutrition will get plants off to a strong start.” A local extension agent can help with soil testing to ensure your soil is ready to foster fruit growth.

When the Parrish family reworked their landscape with fruit, their initial time investment was lengthy. “We had to clear the lot, then replant,” Parrish says. “But now that the plants are in, it’s really low maintenance. Once per year, some of the bigger trees, like the apples, need to be pruned. The soil needs a quick check for acidity for the berries, and if it needs amending, we spend an afternoon in the yard working on that. In the fall, there’s leaf maintenance for some of the plants, but those can be composted. But it’s actually lower maintenance than the non-edible landscape.”

While the amount of work required will depend on the number and types of trees, landscape designer Karen Quiana of LQ Design Interior + Landscape in New York’s Hudson Valley has developed a formula for predicting the amount of time spent tending the fruitscape: “Winter pruning takes a day or two; spring maintenance is the most time-consuming [with] organic spraying three times per season; in summer, thinning out the crop takes a day; harvesting is pure pleasure.”

And how soon can you expect to enjoy that harvest? It depends on the fruit, Otto says. Most berries yield a crop within one to three years of planting, and some, such as day-neutral strawberries, will bear fruit the same year they’re planted. If you’re planting trees, you’ll have to wait a little longer to enjoy your fruit, but if you take good care of the trees, you can expect to be eating their fruits for 10 years or more. ★

Nancy Mann Jackson writes frequently about home and garden topics and spends much of the spring and summer in her family’s vegetable garden.

WEB LINK

Learn how to preserve your fruits at www.hobbyfarmhome.com/preservingfruit