Edibles in the garden aren’t limited to fruits and vegetables

There’s nothing quite like the taste of fresh vegetables and fruits picked right out of the garden. But did you know garden edibles can come in the form of flowers, too? An edible landscape combines ornamental flowers with vegetables, fruits and edible flowers.

When it comes to garden edibles, the typical zucchini, tomato, green beans, and peppers quickly come to mind. There are, however, some plants that not only add beauty to the landscape, but they’re also good to eat. This is especially beneficial for those who want an attractive landscape and edibles, but are limited on space.

Fortunately, edible landscapes are designed using the same concepts as an ornamental landscape. Mixing both edibles and ornamentals gives a gardener the best of both worlds.

There are many ways to use edible flowers, including:

- Fresh or dried
- Infused in a dessert or drink
- Whole or as a condiment
- Raw, cooked or even pickled

Keep in mind edible flowers must be grown organically. Use flowers from locations in the landscape where no herbicides or pesticides have been sprayed.

Experiment with different flowers to find the flavors you like most. You may have heard of dandelion soup, but tulips also are a great edible. Only the petals are edible, and they range in flavor from a mild bean taste to a lettuce-type taste. Remember, many edible plants have specific parts that are edible. Never assume you can eat all parts of the plant. For example, the red stalks of rhubarb are edible, but the green leaves, roots and flowers are not as they contain toxic compounds. Some plants naturally create toxins to discourage animal or insect damage, and that same natural chemical may be harmful to humans.

Shrubs that produce fruit such as blueberries aren’t new to the gardening world, but some people may not realize that lilac shrubs are a great option that combine ornamental and edible elements. Lilacs bring a wonderful aroma to the garden in the spring and look lovely in the landscape; however, the flowers are used to flavor drinking water and the petals can be added to green salads. In addition, lilac blossoms can be candied and used to decorate desserts.
For those who like to add some spice to their foods, culinary herbs are a great addition to a garden, as well as a welcome burst of flavor in the kitchen. These plants add texture and color to a landscape, too.

Other plants to consider in your landscape include chrysanthemum, daylily, chamomile, calendula, elderflower, hibiscus, lavender, apple blossom, anise hyssop, squash blossom and violet.

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