

## Edible landscape

When people talk about their landscaping, they usually distinguish it from the garden, which is of course full of delicious vegetables. Why is it necessary to make such a clear and definite distinction? Anyone who can grow flowering plants can grow edible ones as well.

We can generally use the same growing conditions for our ornamental plants as for the ones we consider edible. Both require water, sun and a certain level of fertility. They all need protection from insect damage and environmental stress.

There are some differences, of course. We do space them differently. In general, flowering plants are placed close together in order to magnify their visual impact, while we spread vegetables out, giving them more room so each plant can produce more. Even so, we should still look at what is edible on the ornamental side, and what is pretty on the landscape side.



Some of the items we find in traditional vegetable gardens can be gorgeous, basil for instance. This is something that grows best during cool temperatures, spring and autumn. Basil flowers are pretty, but since this herb is an annual, it is a good idea to pick them off so the plant continues to produce leaves. A variety like “Purple Ruffles” is exactly that. Its leaves and flowers are purple and the leaves are ruffled. You might not want to harvest such a pretty plant, although you can pick it and use it just as any other basil. By the way, Cornell has a website listing over 20 medicinal uses for basil from all over the world.

I am delighted when I see sage in bloom. The flowers of regular garden-variety sage are lavender and lovely. Since this is a perennial, the flowers do not need to be removed. It will continue to produce aromatic leaves. There are cultivars that have particularly attractive leaves.

Not everyone likes the vegetable okra, but I more people would probably grow it if they knew that the flowers look very much like its cousin, hibiscus. These flowers are often cream colored with a deep magenta center. It does develop seedpods, which are the edible portion, but if you do not plan on eating them, let them dry out on the plant for an interesting look.

Quite a few people grow ornamental peppers, which are mostly edible. Some are bland, almost tasteless, but a few of the newer hybrids are so hot that the seed catalogs say, “Don’t eat them!” Of course, these have the most vivid colors.

I often say that people should grow asparagus for so many reasons – for one thing, it can handle our soils and our climate. They are edible and can be ornamental, too. If spears are not harvested, they burst into asparagus fern – tall, feathery and green, making it a nice backdrop for other ornamental edibles.

Not all edible plants are particularly ornamental, and not all ornamentals are edible. It is wise to know whether one can eat a plant. Fortunately, this information is readily available.

Dr. Angela O'Callaghan is the Social Horticulture Specialist for Clark County Cooperative Extension. Contact [ocallaghana@unce.unr.edu](mailto:ocallaghana@unce.unr.edu) or 702-257-5581.