

Can You Eat Your Landscape?

With the worries we have about the current economy, being prepared for emergencies is on the mind of many. To become more prepared, many have started to garden and to raise fruit in their yards. This trend has occurred in the past, especially during times of need. Examples include victory gardens of the two world wars, the great depression and the last prolonged recession during the 1970's.

My grandfather tells stories of his family making or growing almost everything they used. His father was well skilled in welding, carpentry and other crafts. What they could not raise on the farm, they traded for. My grandfather was responsible for growing peanuts and popcorn that were exchanged with their local grocer for other goods.

Locally, during the 1970's, some landscape architects made a large portion of their living designing yards where almost every plant used in the yard produced something edible. Shade was provided by large fruit trees. Shrubs such as elderberry, currants and gooseberries were used in areas they were needed. Even strawberries could be used as a groundcover in ornamental beds. Although turf used in these landscapes was not edible, it could be used to enrich the soil in garden areas.

Although the edible landscape trend has not exactly returned, growing fruits and vegetables in the home garden has become much more popular. Sales of vegetable starts, seeds and fruit trees have increased over past years at local businesses. Local Extension offices have additionally experienced a great increase in the number of questions pertaining to gardening and preserving food.

Cool weather vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, onions, Swiss chard and radishes can be in the garden planted at any time. Other warm season veggies like tomatoes, peppers, melons, squash and corn should be planted between in May or early June. If garden soil needs to be improved up to an inch of compost can be incorporated into the soil. This should be done sooner than later. However, late fall is actually a better time to do so. In the autumn, 2-3 inches of compost can be incorporated if soil improvement is needed.

Fruit crops that perform well in most areas of Utah include strawberries, raspberries, apples, pears, currants, gooseberries, serviceberries, elderberries, peaches, plums and cherries are grown. Care must be taken by those who live in areas colder than the Wasatch Front to select fruit species cold-hardy to where they live. Fruit such as Japanese plums, many peaches and blackberries may not be cold hardy in these areas. For what can be grown, contact your local Extension office.

Most fruits and vegetables grown at home can be preserved for later use using canning, freezing or drying. Many books are available on how to do so. However, recommendations on how to optimally preserve food to make it as safe as possible changes periodically, especially concerning tomatoes. Classes about food preservation and how to use preserved food are offered at most local Extension offices, throughout the growing season. It is actually amazing what can be done. For information on

growing fruits and vegetables in the home garden or about food preservation classes contact your local Extension office.