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The PAVING THE WAY Issue

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Form Meets Function

Edimentals – plants which are both edible and ornamental – continue to trend. Whatever the size of your space, from a single window box to sweeping borders, Newmarket garden designer Melanie Taylor invites you to experience the joy of growing your own



Wellies used as planters in Freiburg

Picture: Hazelwood Plantscapes / Melanie Taylor

Do you dream of savouring that 'just ripe' tomato freshly picked? Or the fragrant scent of a mini herb garden by your back door?

No matter what outdoor space you have, it's not too late to get started on this year's crop. From allotments and flower beds to raised beds and container gardening, even the simplest of window boxes can provide you with something that's pretty to look at *and* delicious to eat.

Edimental plants – those that are both edible and ornamental – are often beautiful in their own right: think of how pretty chives are in flower, or the jewel-like colours of rainbow chard.

Planting edimentals is a low-maintenance,



Herbs and flowers are happy garden bedfellows

Pictures: iStock

wildlife friendly option which increases the biodiversity and sustainability of our gardens. Drought-tolerant Mediterranean edimentals such as rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) and common thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) work brilliantly in a gravel garden alongside the yellow bobbleheads of santolina (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*). With climate change an ever-increasing threat, gardeners and designers are exploring plant communities with similar growing conditions that work in harmony to create resilient, future-proofed gardens. At RHS Chelsea 2023, designers Harry Holding, Manoj Malde and Mark Gregory all showcased edimentals in their fabulous gardens. Harry's School Food Matters Garden was created almost entirely from edible perennials, whilst in his stunning RHS and Eastern Eye Garden of Unity, Manoj demonstrated how to reuse and

breathe life into everyday objects like the beautiful, repainted oil drums planted up with edimentals such as sweetcorn and peas. Manoj's vibrant garden contained striking architectural plants including cardoons and parsnips which he allowed to bolt and go into flower with the most incredible flat-topped umbels. The edimental trend continued in show gardens and exhibitor stands at RHS Chelsea last year too. The Planet Good Earth edible skatepark designed by Bentongpark and Urban Organic included a variety of fruit trees, edible flowers and medicinal herbs and the amazing mushroom bag really caught my eye. It might be a key theme for show gardens, yet this trend for planting edimentals is not new. In the Middle Ages, the French 'potager' or kitchen gardens were stocked full of herbs and vegetables for the soup



RHS Chelsea 2023 School Food Matters Garden by Harry Holding sponsored by Project Giving Back and School Food Matters

Picture: RHS / Tim Sandall





RHS Chelsea 2024 Feature Garden RHS x UBS A day on the nursery – insights into life as a grower designed by Emma Tipping, sponsored by UBS.

Picture: RHS / Sarah Cuttle



Planet Good Earth mushroom-growing sack

Picture: RHS / Neil Hepworth

pot (potage) with ornamental flowers planted in close proximity to increase pollination and minimise pests and diseases.



Château Villandry has a famous example of a formal potager garden. Whilst Villandry's grand gardens are known for their meticulous detail, Mark Gregory's Plot to Plate Garden sponsored by Savills at RHS Chelsea 2023 displayed the potager concept in a more relaxed naturalistic style. If you're looking for local inspiration,

then a visit to the organic walled kitchen gardens at Audley End will give you plenty of ideas.



RHS Chelsea 2023 The RHS and Eastern Eye Garden of Unity by Manoj Malde

Picture: RHS / Tim Sandall

Edimentals can work in any style of garden

Whether you prefer a traditional cottage garden aesthetic or more contemporary design, a vast array of fruit and vegetables such as rhubarb, beetroot and kale will happily grow alongside other shrubs and flowers without the need to create distinct growing areas in your outdoor space.

You don't need a large veg patch or multiple raised beds to get going. Containers of all shapes and sizes are good vessels for growing edimentals; just be mindful of the root sizes of whatever you're planting.

Look at these delightful welly boots in the Bächle, the 'little streams' or runnels in the streets of Freiburg Old Town. Whilst marigolds have been used for decorative purposes in this image, left, they're equally a very useful companion plant for cucumbers, tomatoes and onions. Vertical planting can maximise limited ground space. Professionally installed green walls can be expensive, but there are plenty of DIY hacks on social media. Have fun with strawberries, bush or tumbling tomato varieties, baby salad leaves, and trailing nasturtiums planted in hanging baskets, to create an impressive display.

Remember though to consider the weight of your filled (and sodden) pots if planting containers on a balcony or roof garden.

The benefits of planting edimentals

The creation of wildlife habitats is one of the key benefits of gardening in this way. Not only are edimentals attractive to bees and butterflies, but many provide a useful food source for early pollinating insects and help control pests.

Underplanting roses with companion plants such as calendula and marigolds not only reduces greenfly on your roses but will also attract hoverflies, lacewings and ladybirds to eat the aphids that would otherwise attack your broad beans.

This organic approach allows you to ditch the pesticides and let nature get to work. Planting a small hawthorn tree or hedge (*Crataegus monogyna*) at the back of your border can provide valuable shelter for garden birds who will appreciate the thorniness of its branches to protect them from predators and enjoy eating its berries in autumn and winter. Dormice will also eat its flowers in the spring.

Globe artichokes (*Cynara cardunculus* var. *scolymus*) bring good structure to the back of a border and, if you want a fruit tree in a new-build garden, why not plant an espaliered or fan-trained version against a wall and use the space beneath to underplant it with shallow-rooted pansies and violas?



RHS Chelsea 2023 The RHS and Eastern Eye Garden of Unity by Manoj Malde.

Picture: RHS / Tim Sandall

Fixing the soil and crowding out the weeds

As our soils get more depleted by erosion and excessive cultivation, we need to find ways to enrich them. Edible perennials with their long roots can help aerate and drain the soil. Their deep roots can also anchor the soil and access nutrients deep down and bring them back towards the surface; choose legumes like peas and beans to help 'fix' nitrogen in the soil. If you've prepared the ground properly to begin with, then edimentals used as ground cover will provide little wriggle room for competing weeds to grow.



RHS Chelsea 2023 Mark Gregory's Plot to Plate Garden sponsored by Savills

Picture: RHS / Sarah Cuttle

The 'Biggles' author Captain W.E Johns once said: "One of the most delightful things about the garden is the anticipation it provides." Caring for your homegrown produce will teach patience, whilst admittedly testing its limits, but if you commit the time and energy and accept the odd failure, you'll reap the rewards, both for yourself and your garden's ecosystem. So, I encourage everyone to experiment and have a go. Over the years, I've learned the fun in gardening has been as much about the process, the anticipation and the solace that it brings, as it is about the food we enjoy on our plates.

If you'd like help or advice on designing an edimental planting scheme, or inserting fruit and vegetables amongst an existing flowerbed, reach out to Melanie via email: melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk