

## Edible Gardening

by Maureen Gerrity

If you are like me, one of the first things you did when you moved to Florida was go to the local nursery and buy an orange tree. You would like to go outside and pick fruit from your own back yard, right? Well let's expand upon that theme and talk about edible gardening in South Florida. There is a lot more than oranges to be considered!

Edible gardening has many benefits for the home gardener. You will benefit from having fresh, high nutrient produce available year round if you plan correctly. Grocery store produce often is picked unripe and spends time in transit, all the while losing nutrient value and flavor. You can have food security for you and your family, protecting you from any unforeseen breakdown in food growth and delivery systems. If you follow organic growing practices you will have organic produce which is very beneficial for your health. You will attract wildlife to your yard, providing much enjoyment while you are resting from your gardening labors.

Consider using an edible for a shrub, such as Katuck which is a perennial plant that can be grown as a hedge. Katuk is high in vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, and protein. It can be eaten raw or cooked. The leaves and shoots are edible. The plant is well suited to our area and tolerates repeated pruning. How about planting Muscadine grapes along a fence line, which will provide a lovely screen as well as juicy grapes in the fall? Moringa is another interesting plant. It is fast growing, high in protein and vitamins, and the entire plant is edible.

Fruit trees are a must but you should consider size at maturity before planting. A large tree like mango close to your house would not be a great choice. Some popular fruiting trees in South Florida include: avocado, citrus varieties, lychee, mango, papaya, and sapodilla. The list is practically endless! Consider fruiting season and plan for trees that will not all be in fruit at the same time, spacing your harvest throughout the growing season. Be sure to pick up fallen fruit so you don't attract rodents.

The vegetable garden should be placed in a sunny location (more than 6 hours of sun per day). Try to plant cool season crops in October and warm season crops after danger of frost in February. Irrigation is a must in Florida during the dry winter months so make sure your plants are getting water. Vegetables such as tomatoes can be added to existing flower beds. If you are creative you can select plants for their nutritional value as well as their color and appearance and create a visually appealing garden.

Planting herbs in the home landscape is also desirable for several reasons. Fresh herbs for the cook, fragrance, and medicinal value are a few of the benefits of having a nice assortment of herbs in your landscape.

Your yard can be more than grass and can give you much produce and enjoyment throughout the year!

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