

Food Forest Gardening

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This low-input gardening technique is based on Permaculture design principles, which can provide food, medicine and fiber for humans as well as a habitat to support bees, other pollinators and beneficial insects. Food forests are sustainable, with the idea of low impact and minimization of chemicals. This biodiversity utilizes water in a more efficient manner, recycles nutrients and preserves or adds organic matter to the soil. The Food Forest is a mix of fruit, vegetables and flowers. This combination of plants and plant utilization can look too busy or messy for some people, but can be a more natural look.

Instead of a garden that needs to be planted every year, think of a multi-level forest of fruits, nuts, berries, flowers, and other perennial herbs and greens. These plants attract pollinators and beneficial insects. The food forest can include tall nut trees such as buckeye, hickory, and oak species. Shorter trees can be an orchard of fruit trees including apples, pears, peaches, plums, and apricots, cherries that will utilize the semi-shaded understory. Shrubs and bushes can include, raspberry, chokecherry, buffalo berry, serviceberry, which use up edge spaces, and herbaceous plants like horseradish and rhubarb can live alongside and underneath the trees and shrubs. A combination of groundcovers could include strawberries, purslane, mints, squashes of all kinds, and cucumbers, these will help keep weeds to a minimum while also producing food and habitat. Next plant a variety of vegetables. Finally, vines such as grapes and hops, can be used to provide an edible fence or to line the area. The living fence helps mitigate wind, wildlife, light, and noise from the road and adjacent sites.

This edible arboretum can fit into many backyards with just a little imagination. Most backyards have lots of grass area that is not utilized that could be incorporated within this theme. With the addition of adding annual garden produce along with annual and perennial flowers, selected for flowering to happen at different times of the year, this will encourage pollinators and beneficial insects to stick around. The pathways can consist of any kind of organic matter or perennials such as thyme.

This is nothing new the Native Americans used some of these techniques such as planting a corn plant, and then around that some bean seeds, then around that some squash plants. With the idea the squash plants would control weeds and keep wildlife out, and the beans could grow up the corn stalk and provide nitrogen for the corn, a win - win growing situation.

Communities around the country are putting these Food Forest into areas of their parks or open spaces to act like community gardens. This food can be used by the general public, or the excess can go to food pantries or soup kitchens. Many communities have pathways connecting

these open spaces and this would provide the perfect opportunity to explore each area, take a small break and enjoy the local produce at each park. The idea of planting fruit or nut trees in our city parks should not be a new concept, but for whatever reason it has not been adopted.

This is an interesting trend going along with growing locally and knowing where your food comes from, but can also help out local families. There are many possibilities along this line, so think about starting or expanding your own Food Forest.

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