EDIBLE WOODY LANDSCAPES FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

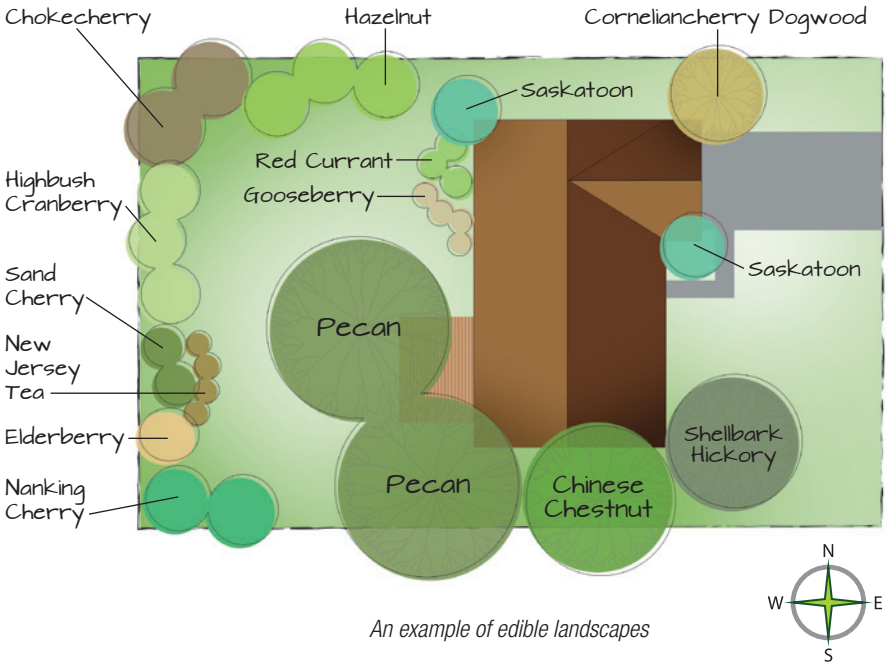
Nearly all of us live in an increasingly urbanized environment. Closely spaced city lots, expanding suburbs, and spreading, low-density ranchettes or acreages encroach upon and divide up the countryside. Our connections to the outdoors, to wildlife, and to sources of food that sustain us grow ever more distant….

Yet we can strengthen our connections to the outdoors and bring that wildness back into our lives. A fruitful and fun way to do this is through "edible landscaping" - using selected varieties of trees and shrubs in our yards and acreages to produce high quality fruits and nuts for our own use, as well as food and habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.

Why Install an Edible Woody Landscape?

Edible landscapes are an opportunity to convert typical landscape plantings that are of little use to wildlife or people into beautiful gardens that provide food for both. They increase opportunities for wildlife feeding, watching and photography by creating habitat that attracts many species of animals (especially birds).

These plantings also create "habitat" for your family by surrounding your home with plants that produce delicious fruits and nuts that you and your children can enjoy together. The "fruits" of edible landscapes also can generate supplemental income or gifts. And the showy and fragrant flowers, multicolored stems, leaves and fruits please the senses year-round.



An example of edible landscapes

Ten Tips for Designing Edible Woody Landscapes

To design a well-functioning edible woody landscape, consider:

1. ***Planting Objectives:*** Will you be harvesting and/or processing the fruits and nuts for your own use, for sale, or will you be leaving them for wildlife?
2. ***Wildlife:*** What kind of animals do you want to attract to your area (e.g., songbirds, squirrels)? By knowing the requirements for the desired wildlife species, you can intentionally design your edible landscape to attract these animals.
3. ***Space:*** How much available space do you have? Think not only in terms of horizontal space across the yard or acreage, but also vertically, combining tall trees, short trees, shrubs, herbaceous plantings or climbing vines within the same area to create a "multistory garden."
4. ***Time:*** How soon do you want to begin producing products? Some fruit-bearing shrubs will begin to bear the second year, while grafted nut trees often take a decade or more before nut production begins.
5. ***Viewability:*** When you are designing your edible landscape, be sure your design allows you to see wildlife from your favorite viewing points – a patio, terrace, window, or special place in your landscape.
6. ***Diversity:*** Choose a variety of trees and shrubs that provide food for both you and many species of wildlife. Intermingle plants that vary in species, size and shape. Choose species that produce foods at different times of the year.
7. ***Maintenance:*** Do you want to create a relatively low maintenance landscape, or one that is more intensely cultivated and cared for? Many improved selections require little maintenance once established.
8. ***Beauty:*** The color of flowers, fruits, stems and leaves, and the plant's form and texture are important to the overall "look" and beauty of your landscape. Selecting plants that will create a long succession of blooming and fruiting will increase the time wildlife are in your yard, and ease harvesting.
9. ***Plant Suitability:*** How suitable are these edibles for your particular site, soils and climate? Are the species/cultivars you have selected cold hardy and disease and insect resistant? How much sunlight and water will they need? Are they normally long-lived?
10. ***Availability and Price:*** Many of these plants are widely available from garden catalogs and stores. Others are harder to find, and may be located through specialty suppliers or the Internet.

Producing Unique Foods From Trees and Shrubs

Species for Edible Landscapes

The following table lists woody plants that produce fruits and nuts with superior qualities (larger fruit, sweeter taste, smaller seeds, thinner shells, etc.) for humans and wildlife alike which means that you may have to protect plants from wildlife if you want fruit and nuts on your table. Most of the fruits listed can be eaten fresh, or processed for jellies, jams, syrups, juices or wine. Nuts also can be eaten fresh, or used in cooked dishes and baked goods.

Because of their lesser quality (for human consumption), we have not listed wild varieties that may produce fruits and nuts, but which are still good for wildlife. These varieties can be obtained from many catalogues or state forestry programs. Species listed are primarily adapted to northern climates. Warmer areas enjoy an even greater range of woody species that produce edibles. In this list we have included unique species that landowners may not typically consider, and have excluded more common backyard edible species like apples and pears.

Elderberries

Ginkgo

Corneliancherry Dogwood makes terrific jam.

Pecans

Species	Cultivars	Form	Mature Width	Mature Height on Good Sites	Hort. Zone	# Wildlife Species Benefit U=Unknown	Wildlife Use C=Cover F=Fruit or Nut B=Browse U=Unknown	Other Characteristics
NUTS								
Butternut	"Kenworthy", "Mitchell"	Tree	40'	40'-70'	3 to 7	21	F,C	Susceptible to canker disease
Chestnut, Chinese	Many	Tree	50'	40'-60'	4 to 8	7	F,C	Prickly husk
Ginkgo	"Salem Dandy", "Salem Lady"	Tree	40'	60'	4 to 5	U	U	Fruit has offensive odor, male & female required
Hazelnut, Hybrid	"Farris 88-BS", "G-17", "Gellatly # 502", "Grimo 188P" "Skinner", "Grand Traverse", "Badgersett" Hybrids	Shrub	10'	15'	4 to 5	24	F,C,B	May spread by suckers
Hickory, Shagbark	"Felger", "Grainger/Heisey", "Porter", "Sinerling", "Silvis 303", "J. Yoder No. 1"	Tree	25'	60'-80'	5 to 8	34	F,C	Unique mellow flavor
Hickory, Shellbark	"Eureka", "Keystone", "Nieman"	Tree	40'	60'-80'	5 to 8	34	F,C	Unique mellow flavor
Pecan, Northern	Many	Tree	55'	70'-100'	4 to 9	U	F	Smaller than southern pecans, but sweeter
Walnut, Black	Many	Tree	60'-120'	100'-150'	4 to 9	24	F,C	Inhibits growth of some plants
FRUIT								
Apricot	"Moongold", "Sungold", "Manchu"	Shrub	20'-25'	20'-35'	4 to 6	U	F	Male and female plants required
Buffaloberry	"Gold-eye", "Sakakawea"	Shrub	16'	12'-18'	3 to 5	7	F,C	Grows along prairies, pastures, suckers
Cherry, Nanking	"White", standard red variety	Shrub	10'-15'	6'-10'	2 to 7	49	F,B	Prone to rabbit damage
Cherry, Sand	"Hansen", "Sioux"	Shrub	4'-6'	4' -6'	3 to 6	U	F,C	Needs to be stressed to fruit well
Cherry, Black	None	Small Tree	60'	15'	3 to 5	81	F,C	Also known as Rum Cherry
Chokeberry	"Nero", "Viking"	Shrub	5'-8'	4'-10'	5 to 8	7	F,C,B	Persistent winter fruit
Chokecherry	"Boughens Chokeless", "Robert", "Pickup's Pride", "Goertz", "Garrington"	Small Tree	15'-18'	20'-30'	3 to 5	81	F,C,B	Wild varieties available, suckers
	"Schubert" or "Canada Red"	Small Tree	15'-35'	20'	3 to 5	81	F,C,B	Most named cultivars only available in Canada
Cranberry, Highbush	"Wentworth", "Hahs"	Shrub	12'	12'	3 to 5	34	F	Offensive odor when first processed
Currant, Black	Many	Shrub	2' - 4'	4' -7'	3 to 5	31	F,C	Wild buffalo currant sweeter than wild black currant
Currant, Red	Many	Shrub	5'	5'	2 to 7	U	F,C	
Currant, White	Many	Shrub	5'	5'	2 to 7	U	F	
Dogwood, Corneliancherry	"Elegant", "Redstar", "Yellow", "Redstone"	Small Tree	15'-25'	20' - 25'	4 to 9	U	F	Makes excellent jam
Elderberry	"York", "Adams"	Shrub	6'-12'	6'-10'	3 to 6	79	F,C,B	Spreads by suckers, flowers used for tea
Gooseberry	"Pixwell", "Welcome", "Clark"	Shrub	3'	5'	3 to 5	31	F,C,B	Some varieties of gooseberry have spiny stems
Grape, Riverbank (Wild)	None	Vine	30'	NA	3 to 5	75	F,C	Easily started from seed
Jostaberry	"Jostagranda", "Jostina", "Red Josta"	Shrub	6'	6'	3 to 8	U	F	Cross between gooseberry and currant
Kiwi, Hardy	Many	Vine	20-25'	15-20'	4 to 9	U	F	Male and female plants required
Mulberry	"Johnson", "Weisman"	Tree	35'-50'	35' - 50'	4 to 8	44	F,C	Invasive seedlings, male and female plants required
New Jersey Tea	None	Shrub	3.5'	3'	4 to 8	10	B	Fixes nitrogen, used for tea
Pawpaw	Many	Small Tree	15'-20'	15'-20'	5 to 8	U	F	Fruits having yellow flesh are usually more rounded, suckers
Persimmon	"Hicks", "Meader", "Pieper", "Runkwitz"	Small Tree	20'-35'	35' - 60'	4 to 9	U	F	Fruits ripen from September to November, suckers
Plum, American (Wild)	None	Small Tree	20'-35'	15' - 25'	3 to 8	16	F,C,B	Invasive, suckers
Raspberry, Black or Red	Many	Shrub	4-6'	1.5-8'	4 to 5	91	F,C	Fruit from early to midsummer
Rose, Wild	Some	Shrub	4'	7'	4 to 5	24	F	Winter persistent fruit, suckers
Serviceberry or Juneberry	"Smoky", "Northline", "Pembine", "Nelson", "Thiessen", "Martin", "Honeywood"	Shrub	10'-40'	5'-15'	2 to 5	58	F, B	Sensitive to foliar diseases, insects

These nut trees are difficult to transplant.

BENEFITS OF EDIBLE LANDSCAPES

Improve Your Environment

Strategically placed, edible landscapes not only produce valuable foods, but also improve the environment by protecting water quality, preventing soil erosion, conserving energy, enhancing wildlife habitat, controlling pests naturally, and increasing the natural diversity around your home.

Attract Wildlife: Animals require food, cover, water and space in close proximity to live and reproduce. Some wildlife species only need a backyard to thrive, others require many acres. Habitat requirements for wildlife also change during the year. Winter food and cover requirements may be completely different than summer food and cover, so select plants that bear fruit and nuts at different times of the year. Summer foods are provided by American plum, chokecherry, sandcherry, gooseberry, currants, elderberry and riverbank grape. Good fall food-producing plants are buffaloberry and most nut producing trees and shrubs. Plants that have persistent fruit through the winter include prairie rose, chokeberry, crab apple, and highbush cranberry. Knowing which wildlife species occur in your region, and their life requirements, will help you determine which species you are likely to attract with your edible landscape.

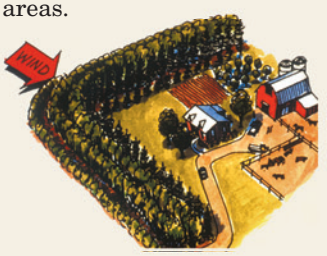
Attract wildlife with edibles.

Shrubs and trees planted along stream or swale.

Conserve Energy: Plantings on the north and west side of your property will block harsh winter winds, reducing your heating energy costs up to 30% while providing cover for wildlife so they can conserve energy. Planting taller nut trees on the south, west, and east sides of your property can shade your house during the summer, considerably reducing cooling costs.

Conserve Soil: Trees and shrubs can reduce the amount of soil lost during heavy rains, especially on erosion-prone areas.

Protect Air and Water Quality: Hate mowing the lawn? Convert some of that turfgrass around your home to mulched edible landscapes that require little maintenance. Less lawn means reduced chemical and fertilizer applications, which means fewer nutrients and chemicals ending up in our surface and ground waters. And edibles planted along watercourses or swales intercept and absorb pollutants before they reach the water. Well-placed edible landscapes around the home also reduce dust, odors, and noise.



Fill your windbreak with edibles.

Control Pests Naturally: Edible landscapes attract many species of wildlife, especially birds. For many bird species, such as the downy woodpecker, northern cardinal, American robin and eastern bluebird, insects make up a large portion of their diet. These species can help keep insect problems in check, naturally.

Selected Resources

American Wildlife and Plants, A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits: The Use of Trees, Shrubs, Weeds, and Herbs by Birds Mammals of The United States. 1961. Alexander C. Martin, Herbert Zim and Arnold L. Nelson.

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