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Edible Gardening

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I have a relatively small garden and I love a lush, full, running-a-bit-wild look. So, as much as I have hankered to go out and pick a snack, dedicating an area specifically for edibles has felt too limiting. Over time, however, I've discovered some plants and gardening techniques that have allowed me to add the edible plants I've craved. My first edible addition was herbs. And my first technique was containers. Hanging along the rails of the back deck, I added flower boxes packed thyme, parsley and sage, and a separate box dedicated to mint. For color—and salads—I poked nasturtium seeds in around the edges. Next came a large pot on the deck with a bay tree standard in the center and basil and parsley around it. This summer, I expanded my container repertoire and added a couple pots of standard and cherry tomatoes, for easy fresh-picked flavor.

Casting my eye to the garden at large, I've taken advantage of the expanding numbers of dwarf varieties available. Dwarf citrus trees have made wonderful additions to a mixed border. A Brown Turkey variety fig was added a couple of years ago.

Thinking vertically, seedless grapes can colorfully and productively grace an arbor. And espaliered dwarf fruit trees can hug a sunny fence line or other narrow space. If you want an assortment of fruit, take a look at multi-grafted varieties (jokingly called "Frankenfruit"). Growers have created trees with up to 5 different varieties on one trunk! Finally, one growing trend, which harkens back to the Victory Gardens of World War I and II, is converting part or all of a water-hungry lawn to multi-use planting beds that incorporate herbs, fruits and vegetables. You don't have to have a dedicated vegetable garden to have your garden and eat it, too!