

An edible and beautiful garden

Bruce Nixon takes us on a tour of his edible and beautiful garden

As I write this early in the new year, my garden does not appeal. Most days it looks dank and uninviting. I dislike mud. The flourishing early summer garden is a distant memory. The lawn is compacted and it is better to keep off it. However, a lot is going on under the soil. Roots are growing; broad bean seeds and garlic are establishing themselves. Aconites, daffodils and snowdrops are beginning to appear. We have just used the last of our lettuce but still have some rocket. However new winter lettuce plants are gaining strength. Soon I shall get a load of local farmyard manure to spread where my soil is depleted.

Today there are many reasons for growing food in our gardens. Vegetables picked fresh from the garden are more delicious and nutritious and you know they are free of toxic chemicals.

We also know that with Climate Change, Peak Oil and Peak Everything there will be growing world food shortages and prices will rise. It is incumbent upon us to be more self-sufficient.

We save food miles. The supermarket system of food sourcing and

distribution causing a huge carbon footprint is unsustainable. It is responsible for enormous waste. The constant pursuit of cheaper food bears down harshly on farmers here and overseas and can undermine food security in poor countries. Growing food locally is far more sustainable. There is nowhere more local than one's own garden!

So, I try to make my garden beautiful and edible. I only grow things that thrive in our garden and do not take up much space.

To maximise the use of space, I follow the forest garden principle of growing upwards, using cane pyramids or trellises for squash, French beans and peas. In our fairly small vegetable patch we grow enough beautiful salad varieties to keep us supplied for nearly the whole year.



Vegetables are often as beautiful as flowers, so I grow some like rainbow chard amongst the flowers. I love heritage climbing French beans. They have interesting names, many different coloured flowers and pods and speckled or bi-coloured seeds.



I also grow broad beans – they improve the soil - squash, courgettes and fragrant herbs like basil and coriander. Nasturtium and borage flowers are both beautiful and edible in salads. Round the perimeter of our garden, I have planted various fruit trees. We have our own apples until the January.

I try to follow sustainable, organic and Permaculture principles (use your browser to find out more). Companion planting, i.e. growing different vegetables and other plants together, makes them less susceptible to disease and pests. The effect is more beautiful than growing them in regimented rows. I follow the cycle of Nature. Almost everything is re-cycled and stays within our space. So, all our compostable food and packaging waste goes into one of my four compost bins or two heaps as does almost everything from my pruning and tidying. We hardly ever use our green wheelie bin.

Neighbours give us their lawn mowings, garden waste and fallen leaves. I hardly ever use harmful chemicals. I plant flowers, wild and cultivated, that attract bees and other beneficial insects. I don't make my garden too tidy. I leave all the seed heads of flowers for the birds to feed on over the winter and I wait until spring to tidy up. I have little piles of untidiness in corners where frogs and other creatures can hibernate or hide. We burn wood pruned from our trees in our winter fireplace.

If you are interested in a wide variety of interesting and often organic seeds, try Garden Organic's Organic Gardening and Heritage Seed catalogues and, for interesting and unusual vegetables, the Real Seed Catalogue. **yB**

Bruce Nixon is author of *A Better World is Possible*.
www.bruce-nixon.com/betterworld.html