

EDIBLE Landscaping

James Scott explores what happens when kitchen gardens become design features and shares his observations

Kitchen gardens are undergoing a quiet but significant transformation. Once relegated to a hidden corner, such spaces are increasingly becoming integral to an overall garden design. Homeowners are seeking gardens that do more than look beautiful: they want landscapes that support wellbeing, sustainability, seasonal engagement – and the pleasure of growing food at home. As a result, edible landscaping has moved firmly into the mainstream of contemporary garden design.

Why the shift?

Historically, kitchen gardens were utilitarian spaces. In larger homes they were often staffed, with wheelbarrows of produce delivered to the house while the owner had little involvement in the growing itself. In smaller homes, vegetable patches tended to be placed "out the back", valued for productivity rather than aesthetics.

Over the past few years, I have noticed that our clients view their gardens very differently. Outdoor space is now considered an extension of the home, and people want productive areas to be accessible, attractive and enjoyable to spend time in. The wellbeing benefits of growing food – mindfulness, seasonal engagement and the satisfaction of harvesting something you've nurtured yourself – are widely recognised. If we were inventing the kitchen garden from scratch today, we wouldn't hide it away.

This shift is driving demand for edible landscapes: gardens where fruit, vegetables and herbs sit comfortably alongside ornamental planting. Many of our clients still want dedicated growing space, but they also want it to feel connected to the wider garden and close enough to the house that cutting some fresh herbs for dinner is the norm.

Edible gardens vs outdoor kitchens

This article focuses on edible gardens and productive planting, not outdoor cooking spaces. It's worth distinguishing between edible gardens and outdoor kitchens:

- Edible gardens are designed for growing food
- Outdoor kitchens are designed for cooking and eating outdoors, often with grills, pizza ovens, preparation areas and normally a dining space.

The two can sit well together, serving different purposes. An edible garden may frame a dining terrace or sit adjacent to an outdoor kitchen, but its primary function is horticultural.

Influence of the French potager

Traditionally, a potager combines ornamental and edible planting within a structured, often geometric layout. Raised beds, fruit trees, herbs, flowers and ▸



productive crops are arranged with as much emphasis on beauty as on yield.

The appeal for modern homeowners is clear: a potager is productive, but it is also a destination space - somewhere to sit, wander, enjoy and engage with the garden. Strong geometry ensures the space remains visually coherent even when crops are harvested or beds are temporarily bare. For designers, this structure provides a reliable framework that accommodates the ephemeral nature of edible planting.

Modern interpretations range from traditional formal layouts to contemporary schemes that blend into wider garden designs. In larger gardens, we often place dining tables within the potager itself, creating a special connection.

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Design principles: balancing beauty and function

In my experience, designing an edible garden requires careful consideration of both horticultural needs and aesthetic impact. Key principles include:

- Setting and conditions: Good light, workable soil and access to water are essential.
- Geometry and layout: Productive spaces should align with the overall design language of the garden. Strong geometry helps edible areas remain visually appealing year round.
- Practicality: Raised beds should be easy to work and not be too high. Paths must allow comfortable movement and wheelbarrow access.
- Protection: Boundaries may be needed to deter rabbits or deer; these can be solid fences or planted structures with rabbit netting in the centre. Raspberry canes, trained fruit or hedging (normally hornbeam or similar) are all options.
- Plant selection: Some edibles integrate beautifully into ornamental schemes (rosemary, sage, chives, asparagus, raspberries). Others - like potatoes – are best kept in dedicated beds.
- Seasonality: Designers must embrace the ephemeral nature of edible planting and ensure the structure of the space carries the design even when crops are removed.

Structures and products

As edible gardens become more design led, demand for premium structures and products is rising. Ornamental greenhouses and glasshouses are increasingly specified as architectural features rather than purely functional additions. Victorian style glasshouses, contemporary aluminium designs and sustainable timber framed options all offer opportunities to create visually striking growing spaces.

Raised beds, planters and edging systems are also evolving. Materials such as corten steel, natural stone, timber and metal detailing help define productive areas while keeping them visually connected to the wider garden. Fruit growing infrastructure – espalier supports, arches, obelisks, pergolas and decorative plant supports – are becoming more important too, as designers incorporate trained fruit trees and climbing crops into their schemes.

Alongside these structural elements, a second category of products underpins the practical and sustainable management of edible gardens. Peat free composts, organic soil improvers, efficient irrigation and rainwater harvesting systems and heritage seed varieties all support productive horticulture while reinforcing the responsible choices long embedded in professional practice.

Looking ahead

Edible landscaping is becoming a standard element of garden design and the trend shows no sign of slowing. For our industry, the commercial opportunity lies in developing edible gardens that combine reliable productivity with strong visual appeal, creating spaces that feel integral to modern outdoor living.



JAMES SCOTT

James Scott FSGLD MBALI is managing director and principal designer at The Garden Company. He is an Accreditor for the Society of Garden and Landscape Designers and Head Judge for the SGLD Design Awards. He also serves on the judging panel for Pro Landscaper Project Awards.

thegardenco.co.uk

Product



ALITEX 'ICKWORTH' GLASSHOUSE

Price: £55,600 (inclusive of VAT, but not the brick base)

Dimensions: 2.9m x 7.1m, with extended feature lobby on either side

Designed in a distinctive cruciform shape, this Alitex glasshouse creates a generous, light-filled space for both growing and entertaining. Its dual extended lobbies add versatility, offering room for everything from productive planting to relaxed gatherings. Handcrafted in Britain, Alitex has been creating beautiful Victorian-inspired aluminium glasshouses for over 70 years.

alitex.co.uk



