

Greetings from my Urban Farm

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As a new “urban farmer”, I pursue a permaculture approach to create my edible landscape. Let it be known, urban farming has huge benefits and gives us beauty, functionality, nutritional and medicinal benefits, not to forget the learning experience, deeper appreciation and understanding of plant group interaction, the use of foods and herbs to sustain our health and wellness, the contribution an edible landscape makes to the bio-diversity in our area, and the enjoyment of harvesting and enjoying food that has texture, taste, and energy! Urban farming has much farther reaching benefits than attaching dollars and cents to the harvest itself!

Like any gardening activity, urban farming provides great exercise and brings oxygen into our system (gym fees saved!). It is therapeutic for our information overloaded brains to ground ourselves in a tranquil environment where we can let go of the stress we accumulate in our otherwise hectic lives. We re-learn to observe, look, and listen. We learn to enjoy the small pleasures and grand miracles that nature offers us, very often quite unexpectedly. For me there is no greater moment than going out into the garden with my basket and harvesting home grown vegetables, fruits, and herbs that are absolutely delicious and are far superior even to “organic” food I can buy in the stores! How do you attach a price tag to all of that?

In spring of 2007 I started digging up my front lawn to get rid of some spreading gout weed. It was hard work. The soil was poor with lots of rocks. Once an area of approx. 10 m² was cleared, I looked at it from my living room window above and recognized that a front lawn is the most unproductive and inefficient use of precious urban space and does nothing for the residents, nor the environment at large. It looks “green” that’s all. It is high maintenance and requires considerable investments in time, labour, and financial resources. In addition we are tempted to spread moss-killers, pestizides, herbicides and other toxic substances in our living space.

I decided to get rid of the lawn - square meter by square meter – and I am half-way done. I am creating an edible landscape instead. I now plant tomatoes, beans, zucchini, peppers, artichoke, strawberries, black current, raspberries, lingonberries, and many herbs, such as Thyme, Curry Plant, Marjoram, Oregano, Peppermint, Chamomile, Rosemary, Summer Savory, Winter Savory, Sage, Parsley, Cilantro, Dill, Nasturtiums (which are also edible, by the way), lavender, all intermingled with beautiful blooms of Echinacea, Fuchsia Magellanica, Bell Flowers, Hydrangeas, and many other plants. Plants are no longer in neat rows, but grouped together from a standpoint of how they support each other and from practical and esthetical view points to create colour, texture and a lively landscape. From the street front, the garden has never looked better than last spring and summer and it was humming with bees, the butterflies were abound, and the hummingbirds are regular guests at the fuchsias. You could not even tell how many edibles are in that area when you look up from the street since the taller bushes of Magellanica, a small rhododendron, lavender and other plants catch the attention and hide the edibles from view. This is a great use of the sunniest area of our garden.

Many of the herbs and berries are self-sustaining, easy to grow and even perennial so they require very little attention and investment of time and money. The entire permaculture approach is based on creating bio-diversity and a healthy, self-sustaining environment that requires far less

time, work, and financial investment than a lawn. Because I used direct composting (digging in kitchen scraps in the fall and early winter), we ended up with 55 tomato plants and a bumper crop of delicious tomatoes this year, not to mention our zucchinis, which end up in a delicious soup or a fantastic, healthy, and simple to make cake (an absolutely healthy excuse to eat sweets!). The greatest surprise gift was our potato harvest. I hadn't planted any, but we harvested a whole basket full of the most delicious tasting potatoes – grown from the kitchen scraps! My garden always offers a surprise or two. I hope the palm tree will continue to thrive as it oversees the area in front of the house, and that my banana in the backyard will also make it through the winter.

For enjoyment and information on permaculture and what one can achieve in the most unexpected places, I recommend viewing the **Krameterhof*** website, especially the videos (<http://www.krameterhof.at/index.php?id=videos>), showing Sepp Holzer who turned a cold, fir-forested mountainside in Austria into a bio-diversity, permaculture paradise where even Mediterranean vegetables and fruits are now growing. Another one of my favorites on edible landscapes and permaculture is the book "Gaia's Garden" by Toby Hemenway. It is most enjoyable to read and provides wonderful insights and guidance on how to turn an urban lot into an edible landscape. Happy farming, Fellow Gardeners!

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* I am in no way personally connected to the author of the book I mentioned in the article, or to Krameterhof, and I do not derive any financial or other benefits from recommending their information. I simply found it inspiring, amazing, and a great guiding light to achieve what I achieved so far and to continue turning my own property into a Garden of Eden.