

## Edible Landscaping Part Two: Choosing Your Site and Best Choices for Edibles in Tahoe

by Lynne Brosch and Rebecca Bryson

There are a few important things to keep in mind when planting edibles in Tahoe. Number one, you need a location that receives at least 6 hours of sun. Keep in mind the angle of sun as the summer progresses. An area in your yard that is sunny in June may be in the shade by mid-July. Know your site. Also keep in mind the protection from strong wind and colder nights if your growing area is protected by a fence, near the house for warmth, within a raised bed where you can cover from cold and pest, etc. Many homes in Tahoe have their sunniest locations in their front yard near the street. The front yard can be an excellent place to grow your edibles but close to the street is NOT. If you plant near the street, dirt and pollution from traffic and the roadway will be very unhealthy for your plants and for you if you eat their product.

Number two on your list and just as important will be your soil condition. If you are planning to plant in your decomposed granite soil forget it. You will need to bring in compost with good organic matter to build up your soil. We often recommend raised beds and containers to grow edibles to account for your improved soil need which can be more easily maintained within a smaller area. Your established landscape plants will suffer with a lot of disturbance of their roots if you attempt to bring in soil and interplant edibles.

Number three is your water concern. Another reason you want a dedicated area for edibles is that you will need to water them much more than your natives and established shrubbery, trees and perennials. If you have a raised bed or containers near a separate watering system you will have much more success. Your edibles will not receive their moisture from Mother Nature, you will have to be the mother.

### **Specific Edibles for Tahoe** by Rebecca Bryson

Despite the national local food movement, many people think that it is too difficult to grow vegetables up here. However, the good news is that more and more people here are doing it successfully. This article will give you some tips on what works for them and how they do it!

## **Heat-Loving Crops (Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplants)**

Usually produce is grown best in raised beds, which warm the soil up quicker, but heat loving plants can also really thrive in containers on a deck next to a house. During the day, the sun is reflected onto the plants. At night, the house provides a thermal mass that produces heat all night. For deck tomatoes, it's best to buy the determinate or "bush" varieties such as celebrity, topsy tom, and patio, but all the tomatoes will ripen at once. Alternatively, you can get the continuously producing indeterminate variety, but you will need a big pot for the roots - ideally 10-15 gallons.

Ideally, you want pots you can bring indoors at night in early September if we get chilly nights just as the tomatoes are ripening. Then make sure to water these plants in the morning only. Wet leaves at night attract pests/disease and worse, dousing with water late in the day shuts down plant growth at night (and with our short growing season, you need them to be warm and grow all night!) To help keep tomatoes warm at night, consider using the Wall of Water product that serves as a mini greenhouse. And remember, dark pots will heat up and dry out fast, so keep plants moist and protect them from the very hottest, late afternoon sun if possible.

## **Peas/Bean**

Peas and beans can do very well up here. The seeds of these cold tolerate plants can be planted before last frost (or started indoors if you prefer). All they need is a trellis and good sun (but preferably not hot afternoon sun). Given their height, they should be planted on the north side of your bed, but you can also plant them on the south or west side and put leafy greens behind. As the peas grow, they provide welcome shade for greens. Scarlet runner beans do well here and are very attractive.

## **Leafy Greens**

Leafy greens are another cool season crop which tolerate some frost and can be planted in late May. Long time growers up here say they typically plant seeds on May 1<sup>st</sup>, June 1<sup>st</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup>. This year people started in April. Sometimes the May/April ones won't make it, but this year they did (with a cover on the few frosty nights) and people have been harvesting for weeks. Leafy greens need to be shaded from our hot afternoon sun. The good news is that with their shallow root systems, they can be planted in a variety of creative containers that can be moved around during the season (including old gutters, plastic bins, wooden crates, wine barrels, or even vertical PVC pipe - if you're low on garden space.) In deck containers, leafy greens are very pretty interspersed with annuals and/or flowering perennials.

## **Cruciferous Vegetables**

This cool season group includes broccoli, cauliflower, collards and my favorite - kale. Don't expect to have big heads of broccoli and cauliflower like you would find at the store, but with the right morning sun, they can do well here.

Curly kale also seems to do okay with hot sun - especially if placed with other plants. It is my favorite plant. I stick plugs of it everywhere in with my perennials and it continues to produce all summer. It looks especially nice with yellow yarrow and purple catmint, lavender, or salvia. It also complements the soft grays and whites of Lamb's Ear, Artemisia and Sweet Alyssum. If like me, you think cooked kale is not delicious, below is a kale salad recipe that may just hook you. Soon you too might be wanting to grow it everywhere...

### **Onions, Garlic and Chives - the Pest Deterriers**

These undervalued crops not only grow well here, but their smell helps deter some common pests (rabbits, squirrels, etc). Based on my experience, their presence among other crops does help repel pests. Given their small size, I often use them to fill the empty spaces between other veggies.

### **Others**

People also tend to have luck with potatoes, carrots, beets and summer squash. While they do better in beds, potatoes and squash can be grown in our soil mixed with good compost. Once again, don't expect to get the size you find in the stores, but they will be small and tasty. HELPFUL HINT: garlic, potatoes, carrots and beets can all be planted in late October and will continue to grow quietly underground all winter. This spring, my friend was harvesting little carrots in May.

### **General Tips**

- Build your raised beds at least 2 feet high to keep out rabbits.
- Line bottom of raised beds with  $\frac{1}{4}$  chicken wire to keep out voles -if you don't have them now, you may next season.
- Plant crops closer than the package says to maximize use of space. Our growing season is too short for crops to reach full size.
- Mulch, mulch, mulch - a thin layer of mulch protects the soil from the baking sun, allowing soil to retain water longer and save on the water bill. Pine needles can be used as mulch too, especially for seedlings, but don't mix them into your garden soil. It makes it too acidic.

- Plant companion plants together where possible and crop rotate. For example, if planting in a raised bed, alternate placement of the heavy nitrogen users tomatoes and peppers with nitrogen replacers peas/beans.

### **MEDITERRANEAN KALE FROM RAW FOOD MADE EASY**

8 kale leaves stems removed  
3 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil  
3 teaspoons fresh lemon juice or juice from the olive jar  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  red bell pepper, diced  
2 Tablespoons raw pine nuts  
2 Tablespoons sliced black olives  
Dash black pepper  
(I love it with grated parmesan!)

Remove kale leaves from stems and rip into pieces. Place in a mixing bowl along with the olive oil, lemon (or olive juice), and salt. **IMPORTANT:** With clean hands or the back of a spoon, really rub and work the dressing into the leaves until each part is coated. Add bell pepper, pine nuts, and olives. Let sit at least 10 min at room temp to marinate and soften leaves before serving. Season to taste with salt/pepper.

Resources:

[http://ucanr.edu/sites/sacmg/Edible\\_Landscaping/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/sacmg/Edible_Landscaping/)

<http://ucanr.edu/sites/gardenweb/Vegetables/>