

# GROW FOOD NOT LAWNS: THE FERTILE WORLD OF FOODSCAPING

Forget landscaping – foodscaping is the new obsession to hit the gardening world. It describes the movement towards edible landscaping – using all or the major areas of a lawn to grow food. Picture grass and shrubbery replaced with berry bushes, and a range of edible foods integrated into the landscape in a functional and beautiful way.

by Nina Tovey





Households, businesses and public spaces around the world are embracing foodscaping as a sustainable way to incorporate edible plants into their environments to add interest, colour, texture, taste – and let's not forget the potential cost savings that can come with growing your own food.

A survey released in March by The Australia Institute showed 52 per cent of Australian households grow their own food and 91 per cent agree that it saves them money.

Architecture and Design Lecturer for the Writtle School of Design (UK) and passionate foodscaping advocate Joshua Zeunert believed it was ironic many industrialised and developing nations still destroy traditional food-producing landscapes in order to 'landscape' them.

"The 'lawn' in Australia remains an institution – yet it is so alien to a largely arid country when you look at things subjectively. Although Australians are making good progress, the nation as a whole largely has a taste for landscapes that are ornamental and picturesque."

Joshua said it made no sense to pour finite energy sources into ornamental and unproductive landscapes.

"Embracing foodscaping on a mainstream level would diversify our food systems and increase the amount of food produced and consumed locally. It is also an effective way to address issues such as global overpopulation and the need to feed immensely increasing numbers of people in a world with decreasing finite energy sources and an unstable climate."

Joshua pointed to Mediterranean countries as an example of communities with an intrinsic connection to food.

"I recently cycled through northern Italy and not only did I see agricultural production everywhere I looked, many trees and shrubs on public land were edible species. Instead of treating food as an economic commodity to be traded, these cultures see food as the hub of life and family."

An unstable global economy and reduced faith in the global food system is seeing a greater community participation in urban agricultural initiatives such as foodscaping.

"We've watched the exponential rise of the organic industry and a greater interest in the local food movement. Eating healthily is no longer marginal in Australia and people are taking more interest as they realise what they eat and drink accounts for a significant amount of their ecological footprint," said Joshua.

When considering what foodscaping can achieve when brought to life on a grand scale, you need look no further than the Eden Project in Cornwall, England. A 15-hectare sustainability and plant project attracting more than a million visitors a year, it features a food garden adjoining to the popular café where fresh edible produce has been incorporated into the landscape and makes the link to dining guests between growing and eating.

Closer to home, Annemarie and Graham Brookman transformed 15 hectares of land in Gawler, Adelaide into a permaculture treasure ground called The Food Forest.

Growing 160 varieties of organically certified fruit and nuts, wheat and vegetables, free range eggs, honey, carob beans and Australian native foods, the pair educate visitors on how an ordinary family with a typical income can grow its food and create a productive and diverse landscape.

The Food Forest spreads its message through conducting tours and regular open days on its property, running permaculture design courses and offering a consultancy service for the planning of sustainable properties or lifestyles.

The health benefits that come with growing your own food are undisputed, with Professor Tim Lang from the Centre for Food Policy at City University London declaring gardening and community food growing as particularly beneficial for the large number of children and adults who live with challenging mental health problems.

These benefits were explored in the 2014 study 'The benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing' by Garden Organic and Sustain.

"Gardening and community food grow deserves the attention of health professionals, spatial planners and other policy makers who are well placed to make it possible for people to participate in beneficial horticultural activities," said Tim.

"Green space and food growing spaces need to be created and protected in the environments where we live to make it easy for people to participate in gardening, allotments, community food growing and horticultural therapy. Meanwhile, action already piloted by GPs and health authorities to 'prescribe' gardening and food growing to those with physical or mental health conditions should be recognised and replicated."

 [foodforest.com.au](http://foodforest.com.au)  
[edenproject.com](http://edenproject.com)



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## Reasons to chase that gardening glow



1. A growing number of studies are finding improved mental and physical health benefits of gardening that extend beyond the rewards of fresh air and exercise. University of Texas and Texas A&M Professors asked a group of older adults how they would rate their 'zest for life', levels of optimism and overall resilience and fortitude. The results showed that gardeners have significantly higher scores in all areas than non-gardeners.
2. Gardening has shown to lead to weight loss and better overall physical health, including bone strength. The University of Arkansas found in a study of more than 3,000 senior women, those involved in regular gardening had lower rates of osteoporosis than joggers, swimmers and aerobics enthusiasts.
3. Researchers from the International Society for Horticultural Science interviewed 42 people with and without cancer. They found that all participants used gardening as a coping strategy over stressful periods.
4. Studies have found gardening helps people with dementia and anxiety become more calm, leading to better sleep patterns and improved quality of rest.