

A Native Garden Can Taste Good Too

As many of you know I am starting to populate a new [website](http://www.WeedingWildSuburbia.com) (www.WeedingWildSuburbia.com). Last night I posted a new [article](#) and a [plant list](#). It is a continuation of the blog entries on designing the East Garden. Thought I'd post it here too since many have not yet found the website.

East Garden with logs laid out to mark a possible path through the garden.



The East Garden, inside the side gate of my yard, is ugly. It is neither a passage way nor a defined garden. Located next to the back porch and a wooden deck, this highly visible space has been neglected far too long. Two years ago the 36 by 16 foot rectangle was covered with lawn. In an ongoing quest to make the garden more interesting and less thirsty, I decided the lawn had to go. For a while the area was covered with cardboard sheets and leaves, allowing nature to do the hard work of killing and decomposing the grass. Now, as the fall planting season approaches, I am anxious to create a plan for this new garden.

The East Garden gets quite a bit of sun during the summer and is not far from the kitchen. It is a transitional space between a small secluded shade garden and an oval of lawn. The shade garden

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has a rustic path defined by flagstones. The oval lawn, looking like a small green pond, is one of few remaining grassy spaces. I plan to extend the path from the shade garden through the East Garden to provide continuity and flow in the yard, while directing eyes and feet to the green pond in the back.

Deciding what the rest of the East Garden will become has been a long process but an interesting one. Initially I visualized a coastal sage scrub native garden featuring wild sage (*Salvia* species), buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), deergrass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) and California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*). Although gardening with local natives is a passion of mine, I was not sold on this idea. I asked family and friends for their opinions. And finally, I posted pictures of the space on my blog and asked readers for comments. One reader made many excellent suggestions and ended her comment with the following:

Or, from a totally different perspective, you could use that space for veggies! It looks like it gets a decent amount of sun, especially near the walk...

Golden currant (*Ribes aureum*) berries make wonderful jam or are tasty right off the shrub.



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For years I have grown tomatoes, lettuce and herbs in the few small spots with enough sun for these vegetables, but I have never been a big vegetable gardener. Growing vegetables has increased in popularity recently, and with a family of aspiring chefs, I too have been bitten by the Farmer Jane bug. And so I am now considering a kitchen garden featuring native and traditional herbs, vegetables, and fruit trees.

Once I settled on this, it occurred to me that the garden had been moving in this direction for years. A mature Fuerte avocado tree emerges from the center of the deck. A young orange tree was planted next to the deck a couple of years ago. The gate is flanked by two wild grapes (*Vitis* 'Roger's Red') that have produced small but delicious fruit. Near the porch is a native currant (*Ribes aureum*) that I have been nibbling on all summer. Wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca* ssp. *californica*) creep through the shade garden. And an old rosemary bush, five tall and wide, stands next to the deck. Along the fence are several wild sages that often flavor my tea and cooking. And on the porch traditional herbs like thyme, parsley, chives, and tarragon grow in containers ready to be added to a cooking pot at a moments notice.

Wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca* ssp. *californica*) grow in a container on the back porch.



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In a rather unplanned, serendipitous manner, food plants, both native and exotic, have been infiltrating this garden. How could it be otherwise? It is near the kitchen and it gets sun. With excitement I realize there are so many more native plants that I can grow along with the traditional garden fruits, herbs and vegetables: Wild mint (*Pycnanthemum californicum*), yerba buena (*Satureja douglasii*), redskin onion (*Allium haematochiton*), sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*), lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*), California blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*), California bay (*Umbellularia californica*) would all be excellent additions. Check my website for a plant list of edible native plants.