Plant Edible Guilds

What is an edible plant guild?

A mutually beneficial plant community that is designed to provide food for humans. It is filled with diverse plant species, has a natural planting pattern similar to those found in nature and serves many practical functions naturally.

What are some of the functions a plant guild can serve?

Know Your Garden & Your Wishes

Conduct a site assessment of your landscape (see “Choosing the Right Plants”). Then create a wish list of functions based on your needs.

Know Your Plants

Use your site assessment and wish list to guide plant selection. Some things to consider when making plant choices: Cultural requirements, food value, mature height and width, growth rate, wildlife value, evergreen or deciduous, bloom time, fragrance, pollination requirements, disease resistance, annual maintenance regimen...

Planting and Maintaining Your Edible Plant Guild

Natural Planting Patterns—Stacking plant layers

Canopy Tree; Understory Tree or Tall Shrub; Vine; Medium Shrub; Small Shrub/Perennials/Annuals; Groundcover; Ephemerals

Planning for Succession

Annual self-sowing plants; Nitrogen-Fixers (NF); Dynamic or Nutrient Accumulators (DA)

A Healthy Start: Planting, watering, fertilizing, mulching

Trees and shrubs should be planted in native soil and mulched; non-woody, perennial or annual plants require more fertile soil. Place container plantings in landscape until plants fill or fill empty spaces with beneficial annual or short-lived plants (succession).

Modifying Existing Landscapes

Plant small when in competition with existing mature trees and mulch well. Or, use raised beds or sheet mulch to establish plants—being careful not to change the soil level dramatically.

Maintenance: Watering, mulching, pruning, pest & disease control

Fertilizing should be minimal on trees and shrubs and established plantings should only require water during the hottest and driest part of summer.
Edible Plant Guilds: Plant List and Further Resources

A – Annual
DA – Dynamic Accumulator
DT – Drought Tolerant
E – Edible
EV – Evergreen Foliage
NF – Nitrogen-Fixing
W – Wildlife Habitat
SH – Shade Tolerant

Canopy Tree – 30 feet or more

Beech – Fagus spp. E, W
Chestnut – Castanea spp. DT, E, W
Fruiting Cherry -- Prunus spp. E, W
Ginkgo – Ginkgo biloba DT, E
Mulberry – Morus spp. E, W
Red Alder – Alnus rubra NF, W
Red Maple – Acer rubra W
Stone Pine -- Pinus spp. (edulis, pinea, koraiensis, bungeana) DT, E, EV, W
Oak – Quercus spp. DT, W
Wainut – Juglans spp. DT, E, W
Weeping Alaska Cedar – Chamaecyparis nootkatensis ‘Pendula’ EV, W

Understory Tree/Tall Shrub – 10 to 25 feet

*Apple – Malus spp. E, W
Azara – Azara microphylla DT, EV, W
Bamboo – Phyllocladus spp. (edulis, vivax) E, EV
Bay Laurel – Laurus nobilis DT, E, EV
Cornelian Cherry -- Cornus mas E, W
Crabapple – Malus spp. E, W
Eucryphia – Eucryphia x nymansay EV, W
Elderberry – Sambucus spp. E, W
Fig -- Ficus carica DT, E
Filbert – Corylus spp. E, W
Fruiting Quince – Cydonia oblonga DT, E, W
Himalayan Birch – Betula utilis var. jacquemontii DT, SH
Medlar -- Mespilus germanica E, W
Mountain Ash, Rowan – Sorbus aucuparia E, W
Peach – Prunus spp. E, W
Pear; Asian, European or Perry -- Pyrus spp. E, W
Persimmon – Diospyros spp. E
Plum – Prunus spp.E, W
Red Osier Dogwood – Cornus sericea W, SH
Sea Buckthorn – Hippophae rhamnoides DT, E
Strawberry Tree – Arbutus unedo DT, E, W
Vine Maple – Acer circinatum W, SH
Vine

*Grape Kiwi – Actinidia arguta, kolomitka E, SH
Hops – Humulus lupulus E
Mashua – Tropaeolum tuberosum A, E
Scarlet Runner Bean – Phaseolus coccineus A, E, NF, W

Medium Shrub – 5 to 10 feet

Aronia – Aronia meloncarpa DT, E
Asparagus – Asparagus officinalis E, SH
Autumn Olive – Elaeagnus umbellata DT, E, NF, W
Blackberry, Marionberry, Loganberry – Rubus spp. DT, E, W
Darwin’s Barberry – Berberis darwinii DT, E, EV, W
Glossy Abelia – Abelia grandiflora DT, EV, W
Goumi – Elaeagnus multiflora DT, E, NF, W
*Highbush Blueberry – Vaccinium corymbosum E, W, SH
Highbush Cranberry – Viburnum opulus E, W SH
Himalayan Honeysuckle – Leycesteria formosa DT, E, EV, W, SH
Huckleberry – Vaccinium ovatum DT, E, EV, W SH
Indian Plum – Oemleria cerasiformis DT, E, W, SH
Oregon Grape – Mahonia spp. DT, E, EV, W SH
Rosa Rugosa – Rosa rugosa DT, E, W
Siberian Pea Shrub – Caragana aborescens DT, NF
Tea Camellia – Camellia sinensis DT, E, EV, W
*Wild Lilac – Ceanothus spp. DT, EV, NF, W
Yellowhorn – Xanthoceras sorbifolia E

Small Shrub/Perennials/Annuals – 1 to 3 feet

Alfalfa – Medicago sativa NF, W, SH
*Artichoke – Cynara scolymus DA, DT, E,
Cardoon – Cynara cardunculus DA, DT, E, W
*Chilean Guava – Ugni molineae DT, E, EV
Comfrey – Symphytum officinale DA, DT, W, SH
Culinary Herbs – Various DT, E, EV (some), W
Dandelion – Taraxacum officinale DA, DT, E, EV, W, SH
Daylily – Hemerocallis spp. DA, DT, E, W
Garlic Chives – Allium tuberosum DT, E, W
*Good King Henry – Chenopodium bonus-henricus E, SH
Horseradish – Cochlearia armoracia DA, DT, E
Parsley – Petroselinum crispum DA, DT, E, EV, W
Salad Burnet – Sanguisorba minor DT, E, EV, W
Salai – Gautheria shallon DT, E, EV, W, SH
Sorrel – Rumex acetosa A, E, SH
Sunchoke – Helianthus tuberosus E, W
Sweet Cicely – Myrrhis odorata DA, E, W, SH
Rhubarb – *Rheum rhubarbarum* E, SH

Groundcover – Less than 1 foot

*Alpine Strawberry – Fragaria x vesca* DT, E, EV, W
Beach Strawberry – *Fragaria chiloensis* DT, E, EV, W, SH
Clover – *Trifolium spp.* DT, EV, NF, W, SH
Creeping Bramble – *Rubus pentalobus* DT, E, EV, SH
House Leek – *Sempervivum techtorum* DT, E, EV
Nasturtium – *Tropaeolum majus* A, E, W, SH
*Oca – Oxalis tuberosa* A, E
Sweet Alyssum – *Lobularia maritima* A, W
Wild Arugula – *Diplotaxis muralis* ‘Sylvetta’ E, EV, W
Wintergreen – *Gaultheria procumbens* E, EV, W, SH

Ephemerals – Summer Dormant

Mushroom Log – Various E, SH
Mache, Corn Salad – *Valerianella olitoria* A, E, SH
Miner’s Lettuce – *Claytonia perfoliata* A, E, SH
Ramps – *Allium tricoccum* E, SH
Saffron Crocus – *Crocus sativus* DT, E

Further Resources

Agroforestry Research Trust, www.agroforestry.co.uk
Bamboo Gardens of WA, www.bamboogardenswa.com
Burnt Ridge Nursery, www.burntridgenursery.com
Cloud Mountain Farm, www.cloudmountainfarm.com
Fungi Perfecti, www.fungi.com
The Garden Hotline, 206-633-0224, help@gardenhotline.org
Great Plant Picks, www.greatplantpicks.org
King County Native Plant Guide, http://green.kingcounty.gov/gonative
Plants for a Future Database, www.pfaf.org
Raintree Nursery, www.raintreenursery.com
Sky Nursery, www.skynursery.com


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