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PREVIEW

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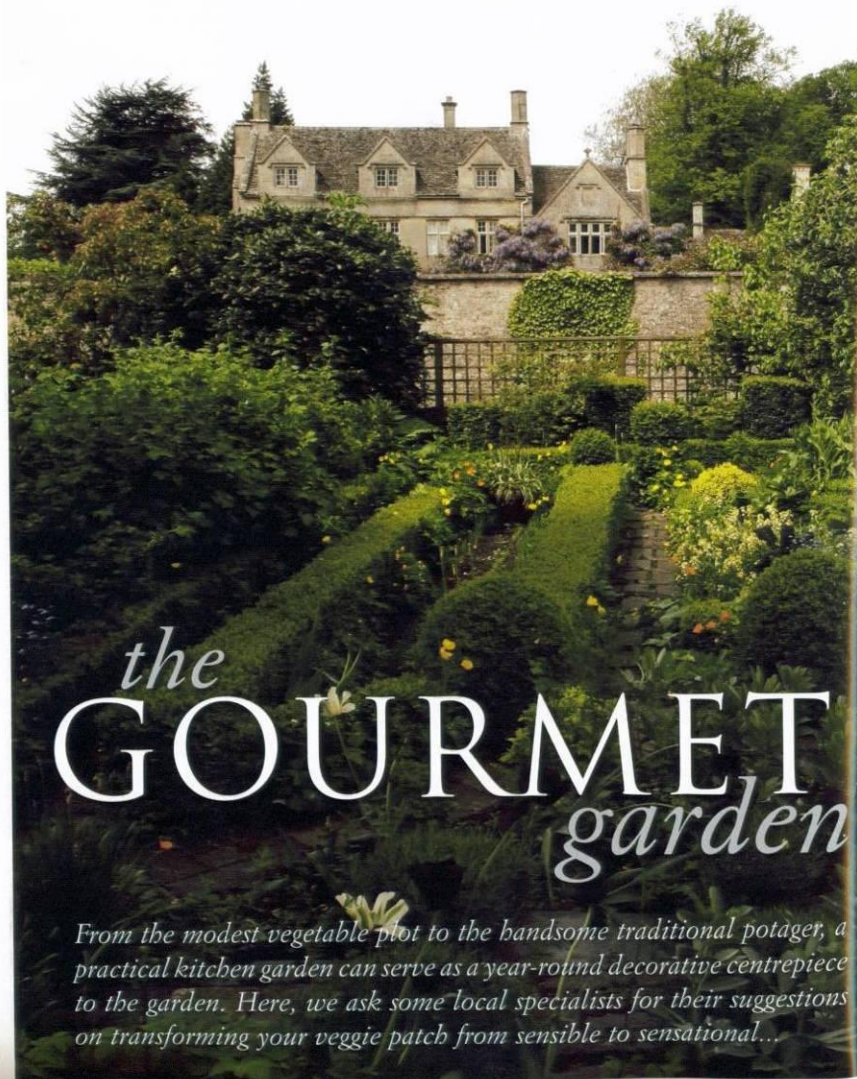
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interiors feature... THE GOURMET GARDEN



the GOURMET *garden*

From the modest vegetable plot to the handsome traditional potager, a practical kitchen garden can serve as a year-round decorative centrepiece to the garden. Here, we ask some local specialists for their suggestions on transforming your veggie patch from sensible to sensational...



Cirencester. The vegetables grown here are, of course, served in the hotel's restaurant and also make their way into vegetable boxes which guests can take home with them.

In its heyday and until the mid-20th century, the kitchen garden was an integral part of most large country houses. Kitchen gardens were highly productive places which supplied food, herbs and flowers to the family, staff and visitors of 'the big house' – but they were also an ornamental feature, displaying a diverse selection of plants and a formal layout. As such, they combined beauty and practicality.

This formal and ornamental style of kitchen garden is what has become known by the French term 'potager', meaning simply ▶

famous formal kitchen garden andry in the Loire Valley. In this lowers and herbs are planted to make the garden's aesthetic s its function.

ardens may not be on such a still possible to disguise their variety of ways, from using the ttage garden to the traditional

ast, kitchen gardens have been sight along with other garden ts and compost heaps," says otswold Garden Design. "But as s has shrunk and our interest in increased, the vegetable patch

out how vegetables are traditionally grown in straight lines for ease of maintenance, "but this can look great from a design perspective also – and particularly lends itself to a more formal potager layout."

Another style option is Caroline's personal preference which she says she researches through books and archive images: the Victorian kitchen garden. "Elements such as trained fruit trees, tall brick walls, box edging and neat paths create an effect which bestows an authoritatively vintage feel into any garden."

One way to ensure a beautiful potager is to introduce elements which are not considered typical of a kitchen garden, such as seats, small trees, topiary and decorative pots. Arbours, arches and obelisks can be used to support climbing vegetables, but

the garden. At ground level, the planting can involve imaginative combinations of colours, textures and growth habits which set your space apart from the modest veggie patch.

One local garden designer to offer inspiration here is Stephen Christie of Stephen Christie Garden Designs. In his words, "Kitchen gardens open up new opportunities in achieving a balance between the productive and the aesthetic areas of the garden – a real creative opportunity to rid ourselves of the lawn and borders straight-jacket."

He says that as well as the geometric, architectural layout usually associated with the formal potager, "there is also the architectural planting of artichokes and onions, the fern-like feathery foliage of carrots, the rich red leaves of ruby chard, the

bunched up clusters of tasty dwarf species of lettuce, the colourful mats of creeping thymes, frilly parsleys at the front of the border... all these offer creative opportunities to the designer."

When it comes to the groundwork design, there is no reason for beds to only be square or rectangular; they can be round, semi-circular, triangular or whatever shape fits your design. The only pre-requisite is that you should be able to reach the centre of the bed without standing on and compacting the soil. Or, alternatively, planks can be positioned to re-distribute the weight of footsteps.

Helen Westendorp of Essence Gardens says that "Designing the right layout and size of beds is important for maximum productivity and ease of use. Also, taking some time thinking about the layout both of the beds and within the beds makes a kitchen garden fit to be in the main view of the house rather than tucked around the back." One of her projects, the Bell at Skenfrith, features beds laid with an ornamental border of lavender or leeks, which acts to hold and define the rest of the planting.

Because access to the plants is important, you also need to consider the options for paths between the beds – these include paving, trodden grass and shingle. Experienced gardeners recommend waiting for a couple of seasons before laying permanent paths, just in case you change your mind about their positioning.

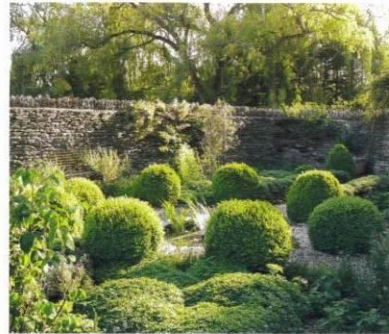
Where possible, a kitchen garden should be located in a sunny spot, avoiding the shade cast by trees or surrounding structures. Vegetables and fruit also need to be kept well watered so the distance between the beds and the water source is another consideration. If your chosen plot is some way from a tap, it might be worth installing a rainwater butt nearby, too.

Your crops will thank you if you spend some time creating the best start for them, clearing perennial weeds and adding well-rotted organic matter. Plus if ▶



Left: A neatly-organised kitchen garden plot pictured in the recommended book *Ornamental Vegetable Gardening* by Sally Gregson.

interiors feature... THE GOURMET GARDEN



you prepare the soil properly at the beginning of each season, the plants shouldn't need a lot of feeding later on. Remember that you should see a cumulative effect – after a couple of years of good treatment, you will literally be reaping the rewards.

If you are dividing your site into beds, then alternating crops between legumes, brassicas, roots and the onion family is the standard way of reducing the risk of pests and diseases. For practicality, you may also want to divide fruit and perennial crops from your annual plantings.

Joe Watson of Cotswold Estates & Gardens has some recommendations for the sorts of vegetables you might want to consider. "My advice to anyone, irrespective of the size of their proposed kitchen garden, is to grow those herbs and vegetables that taste so much better when harvested and immediately cooked or eaten." These, he says, include salad vegetables such as lettuce, radishes, rocket and tomatoes. "Carrots, runner beans, courgettes and sweetcorn also taste so different when fresh and can be harvested when young." He adds that "Improved flavour is mainly due to how the soil is fertilized. Homemade compost and well-rotted manure really add to the flavour of the vegetables whereas inorganic fertilizers tend not to."

Within the kitchen garden, an herb garden usually occupies its own separate space. It may consist of informal groupings of plants or it may be carefully designed to the point of clipping the plants as you would in a knot garden. Not only can herbs be used in the kitchen, but certain herbs also discourage pests so are useful as 'companion plants'. Functional herbs can be combined with ornamental herbs to provide ▶

Clockwise, from top left: A project designed by Helen Westendorp of Essence Gardens / in which architectural wirework gives the garden height; Judith Hann's herb garden which contains over one hundred different types of edible herbs; A Cotswold Estate & Gardens project, with flashes of colour providing additional interest; A garden illustrated in Sally Gregson's *Ornamental Vegetable Gardening*.



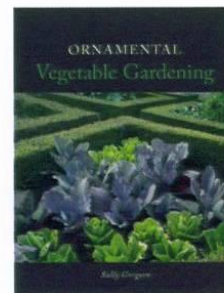
Left: Daylesford Organic's 2008 RHS award-winning garden can be seen at the Farmshop. Above: The view through an arch in the potager at Barnsley House.

particular visual interest.

Judith Hann of Hann Herb's garden contains over one hundred different types of edible herbs. She recommends formal beds edged with herbs like winter savoury, thyme, sorrel, chives, salad burnet and alpine strawberries.

In small gardens where choice may be limited, bear in mind that it is possible to intersperse crops in the flowerbeds or to use containers. Whilst it may not be classed as a proper kitchen garden, some plants, such as mint, actually do better in a container and there are dwarf varieties of most vegetables designed especially to be grown in containers.

"If there was one area of a garden I could not live without" says landscape designer Arabella Lennox-Boyd, "it would be the kitchen garden". She herself is a firm believer that kitchen gardens should be both productive and visually exciting – and she very often has a pool or greenhouse as the centre piece. Elegantly designed fruit cages or espaliered fruit, raised beds with woven hazel edges, lavender and cut flowers in interwoven patterns and sweet peas on tripods of hazel or canes are just some of the delights of her well-designed kitchen garden projects. "Kitchen gardens" she concludes, "delight all the senses."



This feature contains images drawn from the book *Ornamental Vegetable Gardening* by Sally Gregson.

READER OFFER: *Ornamental Vegetable Gardening* is published in paperback by The Crowood Press, RRP £14.99 plus £2.99 postage. It is available from crowood.com or call 01672 520320 and quote **PREVIEW** to purchase a copy at the special Preview reader's price of £14.49 with free postage. This offer is valid until 28 February 2010.

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