



Landscape designer Franchesca Watson tells us how to achieve a stylish, practical and organic kitchen garden

Growing Interest

PLANT FORMALLY Being a garden designer, my interest is not only how to grow vegetables as organically and safely as possible but how to make a vegetable garden look wonderful.

While permaculture and other methods are great and really do work, I personally want a better visual effect. Vegetables in themselves are often absolutely beautiful plants especially when planted graphically in rows with their texture combinations carefully composed.

You can use all the usual design elements in a vegetable garden: colour, texture and height are key but to that add formal pattern to the layout. Think rows of differing vegetables laid out in straight lines, on the diagonal or in circles or wigwams of peas surrounded with squares of frothy carrots. One of my favourite looks consists of different coloured lettuces in blocks of four, all combined in one large group.

THE LIE OF THE LAND

When designing your vegetable garden, a level area will be easiest to work on. Remember that this is farming on a small scale and will involve crop rotation, pest control, harvesting and feeding – and you'll want to be comfortable while doing it.

For this and for reasons of drainage and soil improvement, some people choose to create a vegetable garden with raised beds, especially as one gets older. Most vegetables prefer sun, or at least a full morning of sunlight. Having found a suitable position in the garden, you can then have some fun designing the potager.

I tend to give vegetable gardens a focal point – a water feature,

THERE SEEM TO BE a million reasons these days to cultivate one's own food. Firstly, you'll avoid the pesticide, fertiliser and antibiotic residues – as well as radiation – that we suspect mass-produced vegetables to contain. Then, you'll bypass the genetic modification issue and the effect it has on biodiversity, not to mention the taste of one's food. You won't rack up food miles, nor contribute to the global food crisis. Also, it's great fun, really interesting and surprisingly easy and your children will learn something about how food is produced and their own connection to the natural world.

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sculpture, sundial, bench, topiary or climbing wigwam can all work well – but choose something that doesn't detract from other elements in your garden. You will need pathways between your beds – I like these to be part of the design. A particular hate of mine is arbitrary bricks or pavers winding through everything to give access, which completely detracts from the overall look.

My vegetable garden has grass pathways but bark or gravel are perfectly suitable too. The easier to keep clean the better and one should also be able to run a wheel barrow over them. Remember that in order to look good, the garden has to be immaculately groomed and hence should be very practical.

SOME GROUNDWORK

Good books on organic vegetable gardens abound so I'm not going to elaborate more, but you should:

■ **GET A WORMERY** Use organic fertilisers, your own compost and fertiliser from your wormery – the best kind there is. ■ Visit www.homemakersonline.co.za/features/143/how-to-start-a-worm-farm

■ **UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A TOTALLY SAFE PESTICIDE**, chemical or organic. Some are just more toxic than others so biological control methods are the best. To fully inform yourself get *The Garden Guardian's Guide to Environmentally Responsible Garden Care* by Johan Gerber (Aardvark Press, R195.50).

■ Visit www.gardencare.co.za

■ **TRY TO USE SEED OR SEEDLINGS GROWN FROM SEED** that isn't genetically engineered. I prefer Heirloom seeds ■ Visit www.heirloomseeds.com

■ **BECOME INFORMED ABOUT THE FOOD INDUSTRY** by visiting the Slow Food website. ■ Visit www.slowfood.com ■