



*Helping Communities face the challenges and impacts of growth while maintaining their character and sense of place.*

## Alternative Landscapes

### Edible Landscapes

Unlike conventional landscapes, which utilize plants for purely ornamental purposes, edible landscapes incorporate food-producing plants, such as fruit bearing trees, berry bushes, vegetables, and herbs. Landscapes can be made exclusively of edible plants or edibles can be interspersed with ornamental plants. Edible landscaping design follows the same principles as its conventional counterpart, including the creation of balance, unity, and pattern, while integrating food producing plants into the design.

Edible gardening is not a new concept. Ancient Persian gardens combined edible and ornamental plants, and medieval monastic gardens included fruits, vegetables, and medicinal herbs. During WWII, "Victory Gardens" significantly contributed to a family's supply of fresh fruits and vegetables at a time when these amenities were greatly reduced due to world affairs.

Be sure to review the iTRaC fact sheet on edible landscapes for more information on this topic.

iTRaC is the Nashua Regional Planning Commission's new approach to community planning that focuses on integrating transportation, land use and environmental planning. The program was developed to assist communities in dealing with the challenges of growth in a coordinated way that sustains community character and a sense of place.

### Rooftop Gardening & Green Roofs

Rooftop gardening is an excellent way to landscape in urban areas or where land is not readily available. This form of gardening has a number of benefits. For example, it utilizes space that would otherwise go unused and creates an aesthetically appealing view. Rooftop gardening also saves energy by adding insulation and shade to roofs and helps reduce runoff by absorbing rainfall into the soil.

The easiest way to make a rooftop garden is with lightweight containers. These gardens are inexpensive and easy to maintain. They also offers versatility in design, as plants can be quickly rearranged, and the ability to bring sensitive plants inside for the winter. Pots do not need to be fancy; you can often take advantage of containers you already have in your house. Just remember to add drainage holes.



Photo: Bucolic Bushwick

Roofs that are permanently covered by vegetation are called "green roofs." Unlike rooftop gardens, green roofs typically require professional installation. Green roofs are constructed in layers that provide insulation, drainage, and a growing medium for plants. Lightweight soil or compost is typically used so that the garden does not exceed the weight capacity of the roof. Be sure to review the iTRaC fact sheet on energy efficiency for more information on green roofs.



Before attempting any rooftop gardening endeavor, make sure that the roof is structurally sound.



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## **Rain Gardens**

Rain gardens are shallow depressions containing water tolerant plant species. During storms they collect water and slowly re-lease it into the ground. This limits runoff, reducing the array of pollutants that would otherwise enter storm drains, the water supply and nearby streams, lakes and rivers. They are ideally located where water travels or ponding occurs such as parking lots, downspouts from roof runoff, and down slopes from structures. Multiple rain gardens may be used to cover larger areas.

Soils used in a rain garden should be permeable enough to allow for proper drainage. A good mixture typically contains 60% sand, 20% compost, and 20% topsoil. Plants with deep roots also help to create channels for the water to infiltrate the ground. Plants should be selected that tolerate both dry and saturated conditions. Native plants are recommended as they are best suited to the environment and require little if any fertilizer and maintenance. Introducing plants to a rain garden when they are still small will help them adapt to conditions as they grow.



In 2006, the City of Nashua installed a rain garden as part of the site design at the new Public Works facility. Located at the edge of the parking lot, the rain garden catches runoff and reduces pollutants from infiltrating the ground water and Nashua River.

source: *Integrated Landscapes: Following Nature's Lead—UNH Cooperative Extension*

## **Xeriscaping**

Pronounced with a “Z”, xeriscaping means dry landscape and often conjures up images of gravel landscapes in arid locations such as Phoenix and southern California. However, xeriscaping can be used in any location. The focus is on conserving water and successfully grouping plantings with similar watering requirements together. Xeriscaping's roots are in the Western United States where the concept was developed in the Denver area as a means to address the issues faced in the drought of 1977. Below is a list of techniques to get started:

- Design landscapes with native plantings.
- Group plantings with similar water needs together.
- Limit grass to high travel areas
- Use groundcovers or shade trees on western and southern slopes.
- Amend soils to create an ideal mix of sand, silt and clay.
- Install an irrigation
- Limit narrow grass strips which are difficult to water and often waste water.
- Plant groundcovers or trees on or near steep slopes



<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/GARDEN/07228.html>

