

# WEEKEND

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Saturday, May 17, 2008

Best of Pasadena, Whittier and the San Gabriel Valley

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## Descanso display will give gardeners something to chew on

### Edible Estates at Descanso Gardens

Artist Fritz Haeg challenges dwellers to rethink their ideas of what a front yard should be in his Edible Estates demonstration garden at Descanso Gardens.

9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. daily

Descanso Gardens, 1418 Descanso Drive, La Cañada Flintridge

Admission: \$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors and students; \$2 for children 5 to 12; and free for members and children 5 and younger

(818) 949-4200

[www.descansogardens.org](http://www.descansogardens.org)

[www.edibleestates.org](http://www.edibleestates.org)

### By Evelyn Barge

Staff Writer

What has your front lawn ever done for you?

Chances are, very little. And that vast expanse of grass so cherished by homeowners probably hasn't contributed much to the neighbors, the environment or the local wildlife, either.

At least that's the conclusion Los Angeles-based artist and landscape architect Fritz



JAMES CARBONE / CORRESPONDENT

**Edible Estates is a new display by artist and architect Fritz Haeg at Descanso Gardens.**

Haeg hopes visitors to Descanso Gardens will arrive at after viewing his Edible Estates

demonstration in the prominent Center Circle showcase on display through the fall.

Haeg will be on hand today at the gardens from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for a lecture and to share in-depth information on the project. He will also sign copies of his recently published book, "Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn" (Metropolis Books, \$24.95). Sunday at 1 p.m., the garden will be replanted for the summer, and Descanso's horticultural staff will offer tips and techniques for planting a summer vegetable garden.

The long-term exhibition, which began cultivation on Jan. 10, is the latest effort in Haeg's Edible Estates initiative to transform typical domestic front lawns into productive, edible landscapes.

The Descanso exhibit challenges visitors to rethink what a front yard should be by presenting two alternatives — on one side, a typical lawn; on the other, an edible garden. The sides are divided down the center by stepping-stones and with the structure of a house, which also serves as an interpretive center.

"We're looking at the reality of what those two landscapes do," Haeg said, "and having people think about what you put into these landscapes and what they produce."

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It's the first public demonstration garden since Haeg began the Edible Estates initiative on Independence Day, 2005, with the planting of his first regional prototype garden in a residential front yard in Salina, Kan. Since then, five more prototype gardens have been established in Lakewood; Maplewood, N.J.; London; Austin, Texas; and, most recently, Baltimore.

Haeg's notion of overthrowing and replacing the long-standing American tradition of front-yard lawns in favor of creative gardening landscapes is one with, literally, local roots.

During five years of teaching in the environmental design department at Art Center in Pasadena, Haeg created his first community garden on the college's campus. The event marked the dawn of his ecology-based GardenLAB projects, which would come to encompass Edible Estates and other initiatives.

It's the public nature of the Descanso exhibition — in an open, teaching environment — is part of what makes the new demonstration a unique one to Haeg and his Edible Estates. Most of Haeg's established living landscapes were commissioned by museums or art institutions, and most were planted in the yards of private residents.

"People go out of their way to spend time in (Descanso) gardens," Haeg said. "It's where they get ideas about what they want to do with their own property."

It's also an unusually off-beat choice for Descanso, but one that Executive Director David R. Brown is nonetheless excited about.

"It's already attracted a lot of positive attention," Brown said, "even though it's not a traditional horticulture display with typically beautiful flowers. It reflects changing ideas of what horticulture is and what's important to plant. ... It's our first really significant venture to put in a display garden that has a message."

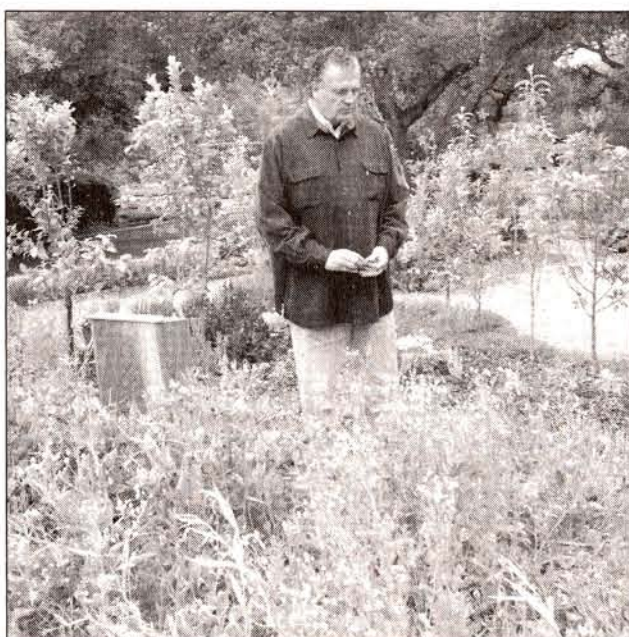
That message is one that visitors are free to interpret as they watch the edible garden grow and produce a veritable harvest, while comparing it to the environmental and social impact of the lawn on the other side.

"Fritz has this idea that the lawn actually separates people, keeps people apart," Brown said. "It becomes a question of using the domestic landscape in a more social way."

Gardens encourage social interaction, Haeg said, and tend to connect people to their neighbors and the surrounding environment.

"Everyone who has visited has an experience with it," he said. "It's that profound moment of reckoning to think about, 'If I owned land, what would I do with it?' We're reminding people they have a choice of what they are doing with their resources."

Descanso's horticulture team has been tracking the variable inputs — water,



JAMES CARBONE / CORRESPONDENT

### David Brown, executive director for Descanso Gardens, walks through the Edible Estates.

fertilizer, labor, fuel — and outputs — food, green waste, biodiversity — and recording the statistics for each side of the display. And nearly 100 fourth-grade students from La Cañada Unified School District have also gotten in on the act by compiling weekly reports on various plants in the garden that are available for visitors to read.

"My plant is the cabbage," wrote La Cañada Elementary student Sarah Cooper. "It does not have any chewed leaves, but I have noticed approximately 10 tiny yellow eggs right next to it. ... I can confirm that Edible Estates sustains more life than the grass area."

Indeed, everything on the Edible Estates side seems richer and fuller of life. And while it has taken on more gallons of water, pounds of fertilizer and man-hours than the lawn, it has also produced tenfold in comparison — some 80 varieties of edible plants now thrive there, and a number of productive creatures like worms and bees call the garden home.

"It does take time," Haeg said. "It requires a certain amount of investment of real time, time spent outside gardening."

For Chris Brandow of Pasadena, who started home gardening more than six years ago, it has been, unequivocally, time well spent, he said. Brandow's front-yard garden in the northeast region of the city is featured in Haeg's "Edible Estates" book.

"It has totally engaged us

with our neighbors," he said. "It gives us a reason to be in the front yard, and everybody loves a vegetable garden."

In addition to improving the regular fare on the dinner table, Brandow said gardening has also become a family event.

"I have two daughters and a baby boy," he said. "It means so much for the girls, who are 6 and 4, to learn about what's going on in the garden. It's a great educational tool."

As part of that learning process, Haeg said the tools presented in his book and demonstrated at Descanso can help people develop and adapt their own approach to Edible Estates.

"The gardens that I do are quite extreme in the sense that they take up the whole front yard," Haeg said. "Still, the idea behind it is very simple — just dirt and plants — the most basic ingredients to grow food."

"It takes a while for tastes to shift," he added. "Our ideas of what's beautiful in the landscape have been stuck for a few hundred years now. But other possibilities are out there that are more exciting, more poetic and much more dramatic. ... It's not about following instructions; it's more about providing people with the freedom to follow their own desires."

For more information about Edible Estates, visit [www.descansogardens.org](http://www.descansogardens.org) or [www.edibleestates.org](http://www.edibleestates.org)

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