

THE SUN



TODAY



MARIO'S NEXT STEP
BALTIMORE NATIVE EYES
TOP SPOT ON 'DANCING
WITH THE STARS'
»»» PG 4C

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Turning lawns into salad bars



A pear tree blooms in the Ridgley's front yard.
KIM HAIRSTON
[SUN PHOTOGRAPHER]

FRITZ [From Page 1C]

landscape out front, with fruiting trees and vining vegetables, from which you, the locavore (those who favor food grown within their region), can feed your family.

"A lawn cuts across all social and political strata. It's our common experience," Haeg says.

But he wants people to rethink that.

For Ridgley, 59, a plastic bottle manufacturing supervisor, the project has roots in his online noodling for blueberry bushes to add to his backyard garden. He came across a notice that Haeg and the museum were seeking a Baltimore lawn to replace. He gardens, eats his tomatoes off the vine, so why not?, he figured. His application was accepted.

On Friday, Haeg, Ridgley and volunteers laid weed blocker over the grass and began to create a landscape of circular raised beds and a bamboo teepee for pole beans. On Saturday, with the help of 20 volunteers of all ages, a garden emerged.

Volunteer Shannon Young, 42, a digital arts graduate student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, gently sculpted mulch around thumb-high lettuce plants, as Haeg watered the mounds. Nearby, a few of the Ridgley's grandchildren helped tidy up as others pressed the last of the veggies into the soil and Clarence Ridgley gave mini-tours to neighbors. Taking a breather on the shady brick porch, Rudine Ridgley surveyed the scene six steps down, envisioning the yard in the height of season.

"I can be like the Barefoot Contessa," she said, referring to Ina Garten, the Food Network celebrity cook. "I can go out in my garden and get some herbs."

But right now the yard looks like blobs of dark brown with splotches of green poking out. Between the walkway and the driveway stand fruit trees and blueberry bushes, but unseen are edible flower seeds that will add color and texture as the days warm.

"This is going to be great. I can be out here reading my newspaper and eating figs," said Clarence Ridgley, whose next-door neighbor said his raspberries and grapes could grow into her fence.

"I'm going to have to change mine. I want mine to look as nice as his," mused Wilhelmina McNeil, 67, a retired dental assistant, as she looked from one side of her fence to the other.

The garden raised a few eyebrows. Some people were ready to follow suit, others not. Will the garden bring cute animals or undesirable ones? Will vandals trash it? How backbreaking is this replanting, anyway?

Out-front edibles are not for every neighborhood. That's a nonis-

EDIBLE IDEAS

Here's a look at some of what was planted to replace Clarence Ridgley's front lawn:

- Trees: Apple, cherry, fig, pear
- Berries: Raspberry, strawberry, blueberry
- Grapes: Green, purple
- Veggies: Bell peppers, broccoli, bush beans, cabbage, lettuces, pole beans, squash, tomatoes
- Herbs: Chamomile, fennel, parsley, peppermint sage, thyme
- Edible flowers: Borage, calendula, bachelor's buttons, lavender, nasturtium



Homeowner Clarence Ridgley kneels in his front yard, which has been converted into an edible garden where grass once grew.
KIM HAIRSTON [SUN PHOTOGRAPHER]

Stay off the grass

Fritz Haeg campaigns to turn front lawns into incredible, edible yards



Fritz Haeg started the Edible Estates project in 2005, and has converted six lawns so far.
MEGHAN QUIN

BY ANDREA F. SIEGEL
[SUN REPORTER]

CLARENCE RIDGLEY POINTS OUT to a neighbor the herb patch, the baby broccoli plants surrounded by onions and his mini-orchard. Nothing unusual. These are staples of a backyard garden.

But this is a front yard in Baltimore. Drivers slow to stare. All the sturdy single-family houses from the 1920s and 1930s on this city street west of Druid Hill Park line up behind their green lawns. Except, now, Clarence and Rudine Ridgley's red brick and clapboard home is behind fruit trees, tomato cages, berry bushes and vegetables.

"I could do a lot with those fresh herbs," says Kendall Ricks, 49, a neighbor who works as a chef.

"I am going to have to keep an eye on him," teases Clarence Ridgley.

This is art — designed as food for thought, not only for the stomach.

For creator Fritz Haeg, the Ridgley house is the sixth installment in his ongoing project called Edible Estates, an agricultural experiment that is as

much about people as it is about plants. It is an architectural-artistic-environmental-landscaping-social-political challenge that has homeowners swapping out grass for greens, a lawn for lunch.

Haeg is a Los Angeles-based architect by profession and an activist gardener by choice. His book, *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*, was just published and the Whitney Museum in New York is featuring his work as part of its biennial.

Edible Estates has degassed front yards since 2005, starting in Salina, Kan., nearly the geographic center of the United States. From there Haeg moved on to London and Maplewood, N.J., among other cities, before coming to Baltimore as part of the Contemporary Museum's *Cottage Industry*, which features six artistic expressions that take place on sites in the community. Set to open May 31, the exhibit will chronicle the Ridgley's yard with photographs as it grows.

What Haeg is proposing around the country — around the world — is nothing short of seditious in many a community:

Forget the monoculture vanity lawn that seals you, the homeowner, from the public and looks like every other useless patch of green upon which people expend time, money and chemicals. Instead, establish an organic harvestable [Please see FRITZ, 2C]

sue for Ridgley, president of his Callaway Garrison Improvement Association. It's a neighborhood group, not a regulation-intensive homeowners group where renegade landscaping would have to win approval. Haeg says that's fine for people who like that lifestyle. From his perspective, they can stick a fork in their restrictions.

Haeg, 38, grew up mowing his family's lawn in suburban Minneapolis, paying no mind to the garden out back. He earned an architecture degree from Carnegie Mellon University and worked in New York before moving to Los Angeles for a series of teaching jobs eight years ago.

He created Gardenlab at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena as a counterweight to computer labs, urging gardening with mixed success.

The Edible Estates idea hit him after the polarizing 2004 election. He wondered about common ground. The project "is at the convergence of all the issues we care about," Haeg says. Among them: where food comes from, pollution, food costs, globalization.

For Clarence Ridgley, the recent planting ends 22 years of manicuring his front lawn, yanking weeds here, edging there, fertilizing everywhere. But it won't end the friendly neighborhood banter over whose front yard is best.

Don Brock, across the street, claims to have won last year. This summer, Ridgley says, he'll "blow him out of the water" with a front yard lush with armloads of bounty to share, beyond the tomatoes he previously gave neighbors.

"I'm dying to see it in fruition. All of the neighbors are excited," said Brock, 56, adding this tease: "Mr. Ridgley is a very giving man, and I hope he continues in that tradition."

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