



The Star-Ledger

MAPLEWOOD FAMILY REPLACES GRASS WITH HERBS, FRUITS AND VEGGIES



PHOTOS BY SARAH RICE FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Volunteers Emily Schroeder, left, and Carissa Poletieri, right, clean up and cool off after finishing work on the Edible Estate at Michelle Christman and Christopher Wei's home earlier this month. Over the course of a weekend, the couple's front yard was transformed. Below, a miniature peach tree that was planted.



BEYOND THE LAWN

BY MOLLY ROSE KAUFMAN
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

A man in a gray SUV pulled over to ask a woman in a cowboy hat what was happening on the usually quiet Maplewood street.

"We're planting a vegetable garden," said Michelle Christman, the one in the hat.

The driver scooped out Christman's front yard, where friends and strangers were uprooting her grass. Small children were digging with plastic shovels and someone was trying to get a rototiller to start

"You got enough people helping?" the man asked, intrigued.

Christman, 39, and her husband, Christopher Wei, 35, learned a few weeks earlier that they were chosen for architect Fritz Haeg's Edible Estates project. This turn of events has been slowly changing their lives. It took much less time for it to change their lawns: three days.

They are now part of Haeg's crusade against grassy front lawns. The L.A.-based architect dislikes lawns because they require many resources and increase pollution (when people use lawnmowers and

pesticides.) Haeg also says lawns are socially isolating, underused and could serve a more practical purpose.

"Food grown in our front yards will connect us to the seasons, the organic cycles of the earth and our neighbors," Haeg wrote in the manifesto that explains the benefits of Edible Estates, his grass alternative.

Through Edible Estates, Haeg provides the garden design, supplies and volunteers for chosen families who are willing to get rid of their grass and grow food instead. Christman, who runs her own organic baby food company, Chowbaby, applied as soon

as she heard that Haeg was looking for a family in the New York area.

Once she'd been chosen, Christman culled volunteers from a Maplewood-based online community and Haeg called on his friends from New York City to come out and dig. Gardener's Supply, a gardening and landscaping supply company in Vermont, donated plants, because by early July, it was too late in the season to start planting with seeds. Haeg estimated that more than \$10,000 worth of materials were donated for the project.

"It's kind of like a barn raising."
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