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Home & garden

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The end of mowing your lawn?



Another convert transforms his yard

About the time she started planning this year's garden, Antonia Vassar learned she was on the cutting edge of a project called Edible Estates.

The movement, started by California environmentalist Fritz Haeg in 2005, encourages homeowners to convert their lawns into gardens. One project from each of the 10 U.S. plant hardiness zones will be featured in a book Haeg is writing for publication in 2008.

On his www.edibleestates.org Web site, Haeg explains his purpose in a defiant political statement labeled "the Edible Estates manifesto":

"Edible Estates is an attack on the American front lawn and everything it has come to represent. Edible Estates reconciles issues of global food production and urbanized land use with the modest gesture of a domestic garden."

Vassar's garden didn't qualify for the book because it already was established. She e-mailed her friend Chris Edwards, youth minister at Richmond's St. James's Episcopal Church, to see if he'd be interested in the project.

Edwards, who lives in North Richmond, was intrigued. "I decided to do it for the sake of good stewardship of the little piece of land that I do have," Edwards said.

He tilled his front lawn in March — and immediately freaked out. "I had this yard full of dirt and no plan drawn up," he said.

With encouragement from Vassar, he plowed ahead. He has finished planting one side of the garden with herbs, squash, Swiss chard, lettuce, peppers, snow peas, green beans, onions and two cherry trees to replace the Bradford pears he lost to Hurricane Isabelle in 2003.

"I've really enjoyed it, especially meeting people," said Edwards, who decided not to enter his garden in the Edible Estates book competition before the June 1 deadline.

"That's the best part," said Vassar, as a passing truck slowed to check out the display. "You get to talk to people when they walk by, which you couldn't do if it was in the backyard. And you get to enjoy it every time you walk out of the house or pull in the driveway."

— Julie Young



MARK GORMUS/TIMES-DISPATCH

Chris Edwards plowed under the grassy front lawn of his Westwood Avenue home to create an edible estate.



Create your own edible estate

- Have a soil test done to see what amendments your lawn might need.
- Call Miss Utility, (800) 552-7001, three working days before digging or tilling.
- If you live in a planned community, check neighborhood covenants before planting a front-yard garden.
- Use a sod-cutter to remove existing grass, roll it up, give it away or find a new use for it.
- Use a rototiller to loosen compacted soil.
- Spread the area with two to five

inches of compost.

- Till the soil again to mix in the compost.
- Mark out a plan for your edible estate using stakes and string.
- Plant your vegetables and fruits according to directions on seed packets or nursery stakes.
- Water thoroughly.
- If necessary, install an 18-to-24-inch fence to deter rabbits or other small animals.

Sources: edibleestates.org,
inhabitat.com