



by Pam Bresler, HCMG

### ***Edible Estates***

When you were preparing dinner last night, did you harvest some Bermuda grass and garnish your salad with live oak leaves? No? Well maybe you have a boring, non-edible landscape! What if you snipped some vibrant green parsley and cilantro, pulled a few scallions, and threw in some "Neon Lights" chard? Colorful landscape, colorful dinner. If this is definitely outside your comfort zone, maybe hearing the message of Fritz Haeg, the proponent of "Edible Estates" might open your eyes.

Fritz was originally an architect, but now describes himself as a "practicing artist." Based in Los Angeles, he has planted nine regional prototype gardens in California, Kansas, New Jersey, and London. His goal is to "graft" the idea of agriculture, with its long, boring tractor-made rows, with the art of urban landscaping in a program he calls "Public Ideas for Private Lands." Fritz's website is [edibleestates.org](http://edibleestates.org), and he has a book with that title coming out mid-2008.

Fritz reminds us that an out-of season peach from Chile has tremendous cost for consumers: your wallet feels it first, but the fuel and pollution costs are often ignored. The pesticides used in other countries are suspect, as well as cleanliness standards. The message of eating seasonally and locally is gaining traction, as our gasoline approaches \$3.00 per gallon. Take that a step further. What if your local food supplier was YOU? Even in the dead of winter, your garden can be loaded with cold-hardy produce. Fritz emphasizes that when the first neighborhood pioneer tears out his grass and plants an edible front yard, an amazing thing happens. Neighbors come by to see what you're doing. Next, come the children who've never seen a carrot pulled from the ground. Soon, you are sharing excess produce with newly-made friends. Then, they want to know how to put in an edible landscape in their yard. He claims the dynamics in a neighborhood undergo positive change.

I once tore out the grass in my front yard, as that was the only sunny spot I had. My 45' x 16' garden went all the way to the front sidewalk. It was a flower garden, rather than an edible landscape, but I did have herbs and garlic in there, along a wandering path through the middle, and a lemon thyme edging along the driveway. Soon, neighbors stopped by to ask about my unusual plants. I guess they hadn't seen many Texas Bluebonnets in Michigan! Next, I had children who helped me weed, deadhead, and cut flowers for their mother. Many seniors asked to walk through just to smell the old-fashioned roses. My neighbors, who'd lived in the area for years, didn't even know their own neighbors. Soon, I knew scores of them. I had to add seating in the shady areas, because often neighbors would sit and visit. So, I believe front yard gardening can change a neighborhood and be a public outreach for Master Gardeners. If it is an edible landscape, that is a bonus!