

ProTips for Perennial Abundance: Growing More Food with Edible Perennials

★ Plan for Success

- **Set goals**
 - What kinds of crops would be most interesting or beneficial to you, your family, and/or your community?
 - What are your priorities? This could include: having a bountiful harvest, saving money, providing habitat, finding plants that grow well in your conditions, etc.
- **Know your space**
 - Observe the growing conditions that you have available. Take note of how many hours of sunlight are available and the average weather conditions.
 - Note areas that are exposed to wind/rain/heat/etc. Make the most of microclimates by understanding where they are.
 - Consider watering needs and how water moves across your growing area. How will you get water to your plants? Where does water flow/pool/drain?
- **Create a map**
 - Create a visual representation to help you understand how your perennial plants will fit into your growing area - this can be roughly or exactly to scale.
 - Include elements that will help you make informed decisions about the plants you choose: cardinal directions, existing structures or plants, water sources, access paths, slope, microclimates, soil types.

★ Add Abundance in Layers

- **Lower Layer Plants**
 - Herbaceous perennials that grow low to the ground or die back each season can make excellent compliments and companions in annual vegetable gardens.
 - Shade-loving or tolerating low-growing plants: lemon balm, mint, oregano, sweet cicily, yarrow, alpine strawberries and nettle
 - Sun-loving edibles grow well near garden edges where they have more access to light: sage, lavender, thyme, artichoke
 - Reserve patches for crops that spread: sunchokes, asparagus, & strawberries
- **Middle Layer Plants**
 - Many shrubs, small trees, and large herbaceous perennials can tolerate a variety of growing conditions. They tend to work well in small and urban areas where space is limited and people are often growing plants on edges of landscapes.
 - Shrubs: raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, gooseberries, currants, honeyberry
 - Shrub/small trees: figs, elderberry, medlar, mulberry, persimmon
 - Vines: grapes, kiwi
- **Upper Layer Plants**
 - With trees, an important factor to consider is the impact on space. How big will the tree get at its mature height? How will it impact other plants around it?

- PNW natives: serviceberry, elderberry, hazelnut
- Common edible trees for maritime northwest region: apples, pears, crabapples, quince, plum, cherry, peach

★ Benefits of Perennial Edibles

○ Low-Maintenance & Beautiful

- Once established, perennial plants have lower water and nutrient needs than annual plants.
- Perennial plants typically require maintenance just a few times during the year. This may include pruning, dividing, or adding nutrients in the form of fertilizer, compost or mulch, once or twice a year.
- Perennial plants can be incorporated into ornamental landscapes, integrated into native plant habitats, and/or creatively designed into annual systems - this can add beauty and variety in the form of shape, texture, color and/or flowers.

○ Support Healthy Garden Ecosystems

- Perennial plantings support soil ecosystems and health by reducing erosion, allowing for the growth of beneficial microorganisms (especially fungi!), and sustaining a slow and steady supply of nutrients through the decomposition of roots and leaves into the soil.
- Through growth cycles that provide flowers, stems and organic debris for mulch, perennial trees, shrubs and groundcover can help to provide habitat in the garden ecosystem, benefiting insects, birds, and other creatures.

○ Climate Resilience

- Perennial plants help to catch and store water and nutrients.
- Reduced tillage allows for the capture of atmospheric carbon, storing it long-term in the soil & bodies of plants.
- Diversified landscapes with perennial plants can help to moderate microclimates and reduced temperature extremes, as well as provide buffers during extreme weather events.

★ Eager to learn more? Join Tilth Alliance for a class in Seattle or online:

<https://tilthalliance.org/get-involved/take-a-class/>

★ Have garden mysteries or need support with a specific question? Call the Garden Hotline:

<https://gardenhotline.org/>

★ Excited to get more involved? Sign up for our email newsletter and stay in touch:

<https://tilthalliance.org/get-involved/sign-up-for-our-newsletter/>