



SMALL SPACE, BIG HARVEST

In only 400 square feet, Ellen Ecker Ogden grows fresh ingredients to enjoy all year long.

"I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF MYSELF as more of a cook than a gardener," says author and gardener Ellen Ecker Ogden. "My gardening begins and ends with how produce tastes." Ogden started growing vegetables and fruits on a 10-acre farm in southern Vermont in the mid 1980s. She's also run a seed business and authored five books on topics that range from how to cook with the food you grow to designing a beautiful kitchen garden. In 2003 she moved to a small lot in southern Vermont where she grows edibles that are not commonly found at grocery stores or farmers markets,

including a number of heirloom varieties that are both beautiful and great for cooking. Though the garden is only around 400 square feet, Ogden has managed to fit in a range of herbs, salad greens, strawberries, peppers, and flowers, as well as fruit trees and structural elements that enhance the beauty of the edible garden. We wanted to hear how Ogden thinks about gardening for culinary uses, find out how she fits so much in her space, and learn how she keeps it looking beautiful. Plus, we asked her to share a few favorite recipes she likes to make with produce from the garden.

Above: Ellen Ecker Ogden's potager next to her house is proof that small can be beautiful and productive. The view from above shows off its classic foursquare design and tapestry of edible and ornamental greens. Two garden benches face each other, and an ornamental Korean lilac stands as a focal point in the middle.

DAVID BARNUM

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GD: What excites you most about growing food?

OGDEN: I grow food because I love to eat. Once you taste a 'Touchon' carrot freshly pulled from the soil, a 'Jimmy Nardello' pepper twisted off a green stem, or a 'Bosc' pear dropped from a tree at the peak of ripeness, there is no turning back. Growing food expands your flavor options because some produce just isn't available at a store or farmers market, or it just isn't as flavorful. Plus growing food connects you to the life cycle of each plant, eliciting curiosity about its smell and feel as well as its taste. You can also learn how to use produce at different stages of its life cycle—like using squash blossoms, young baby squash, and mature squash. This makes cooking and eating more enjoyable experiences.

Why is it important to grow food?

Food is so easily bought, but supermarket options have homogenized our choices and dulled our palates. It seems like such a simple gesture to plant a seed, watch it grow, and then harvest it for a meal, yet it is something that many people either don't know how to do or don't think is important enough.

At a time when we are losing the genetic diversity of our food crops at an alarming rate, it's vital we understand what we eat, grow it ourselves, know how to cook with it and preserve it, and then repeat the cycle. If everyone had their own micro farm that produced a greater percentage of the food they ate, then we'd have a

more sustainable food cycle. And the country as a whole would be a lot healthier.

What's your advice for first-time food gardeners?

Think long term. Pay attention to the design, plot it on paper first, and consider a 5-year plan rather than a quick raised-bed garden. Integrate the edible garden into the entertaining area rather than pushing it away to the far edges of the yard. Surround it with berries or an orchard. Plant flowers and food together that will bring in pollinators. Gardens are at their best when they are extensions of our homes and reflect our personalities. Add color, a bit of whimsy, a garden shed to keep everything organized, and places to lounge and relax—turn the work into play.

Why is design so important?

Good gardeners make gardening seem easy because their gardens always look lovely and productive, yet it's really the design and the structure that's pleasing to the eye. When a garden is designed properly from the start, it is easier to maintain and becomes more efficient for successive planting. Choosing a design and the functional elements is as important as deciding what to grow, because those elements will make a difference in how much time you ultimately spend in your garden. Design also means being realistic about how big you need the garden. If you can't really maintain 10 planting beds, then don't put them in your plan.



One of Ogden's favorite spots to spend summer afternoons is on the front porch of her historic 1905 home in southern Vermont. Here she sits with her recent harvest of 'German Red' garlic and ripe 'Jimmy Nardello' sweet peppers.

SHARING THE BOUNTY

Matthew Benson inspires the community with really beautiful food and his eat-what-you-grow lifestyle.

"IT IS SAID THAT EATING involves all the senses, yet the first bite is taken with the eyes," writes farmer-photographer Matthew Benson in *Growing Beautiful Food*. In his book and on his farm, Benson's goal is to produce and celebrate beautiful food. "Wonderful taste is a given," he says. "But I also want everything to look beautiful—the farm, the buildings, the rows of salad greens."

Benson lives on Stonegate Farm (stonegatefarmny.org), a 3-acre estate farm about 60 miles north of New York City. It functions as a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) supplier for the local community, but its purpose is to get more people growing their own food. He runs his operation as a teaching farm, inviting other farmers as well as gardeners to visit and learn how he does what he does. We wanted to get to know Benson more and hear what he tells all those who are lucky enough to visit him in New York's Hudson Valley. Here he shares his thoughts on why growing your own food is so important, how he got to where he is today, and how we can all grow beautiful food, too.

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Above: Matthew Benson carries a bouquet of cosmos and celosia to set a table in the orchard at Stonegate Farm. Other cut flowers grown on the farm include strawflower, zinnia, stock, snapdragon, dahlia, ageratum, aster, and anise hyssop. The fruit trees here—quince, apples, cherry, and plum—are heirloom fruit grafted onto dwarf root stock.

Opposite: The harvest each day is a still life of colors and forms. Pints of mixed heirloom tomatoes ('Brandywine', 'Moskvich', 'Green Zebra', 'Cherokee Purple', and 'Black Cherry', among others), 'Methley' plums, summer scallions, kohlrabi, 'Costata Romanesco' squash, and lemon cucumbers are just a few of the heirloom fruits and vegetables destined for Stonegate Farm's CSA members.

MATTHEW BENSON, OPPOSITE; MATTHEW BENSON



DESIGNER PORTFOLIO

A FINE BALANCE

See why Gary Ratway believes horticulture and architecture are equal partners, and how his gardens are a marriage of the two. Plus, get his 8 take-home design lessons.

BY PAM PENICK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLAIRE TAKACS

GARY RATWAY WAS JUST 18 YEARS OLD and heading west across the U.S., living out of his VW van, when he discovered horticulture. It was the 1970s. He'd dropped out of college to see the country and along the way met up with a friend who was studying botany. "I was living in my bus and showering at his university, helping him take care of the greenhouse," Ratway says. "I started collecting succulents and cacti and decorated my van with them."

As the garden designer and cofounder of Digging Dog Nursery in Albion, California (diggingdog.com), recounts the story, his newfound passion for plants drove him back to school for degrees in horticulture and landscape architecture and then to a job cleaning up a 47-acre fallow garden in Northern California—a garden that would become, under his leadership as founding director in the early 1980s, Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. Eager to marry his love of plants with his training, he traveled to Europe with

his wife, Deborah Whigham, to study estate gardens designed by greats like Edwin Lutyens, whose connections between house and garden particularly inspired him. "Touring these gardens, you feel what they were trying to evoke: the excitement and anticipation as you cross a threshold—a hedge or stone wall or other architectural element—from one space to another," Ratway says. "Each space seems knitted to the next by some element in the distance that pulls you along."

Ratway launched his own firm, Integrated Design, and began creating gardens for clients in Northern California's wine country and along the coast. Drawing on architectural lessons from the English estates but keen to use local materials for a sense of place, Ratway taught himself rammed-earth construction—a method of building forms using a mix of soil from the site, sand, and cement. Since nothing else is mixed in, the color comes from the soil. Using this method, he built retaining walls, columns, and other space-defining features. "Since you're

using soil found on-site," he says, "rammed earth blends with any style: contemporary or Victorian or Country French."

Ironically, the plants Ratway had admired in European nurseries, many of them originally native to the U.S., couldn't be found locally, so he had to grow them himself. "You couldn't go out and buy feather reed grass," he says. "You couldn't buy an aster. There was nothing in the nurseries then except standard things: roses, wisteria, whatever."

In 1992 he and Whigham started Digging Dog Nursery to propagate plants for his designs and sold them via mail order to customers looking for unusual species. "People always ask about the plants," he says with a laugh. "They never ask, 'How did you build the infrastructure?' They think it's always been there. Not everybody cares about a wall, but everybody likes plants."

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID DESPAU



A garden room distinguished by a focal-point pot of bulrush encircled by rammed-earth walls and columns greets visitors to Gary Ratway's home garden in Albion, CA. The two steps up at the center—planted with seaside daisy, Santa Barbara daisy, and thyme—create a threshold into this outdoor foyer where gravel paths from the house, home office, and guest parking converge. From this vantage, the pot of bulrush draws the eye along a path edged with boxwood spheres, rounded 'Mrs. Reed's Dark Blue' rosemary, and a clipped tower of European hornbeam that echoes the shape of the columns.



RHYTHM & VIEWS

Location: Albion, CA | Size: 14 acres (6 cultivated)

LONG PERENNIAL BORDERS lined with columnar shrubs, tapered hedges, and playfully arching trees invite exploration in Ratway and Whigham's home garden. "I'm trying to create a feeling of Alice in Wonderland," Ratway says, "of going through a portal into another world. You walk to the end of a path or through a hedge, and you look one way and the other and decide, 'OK, I'm going to take this journey.'" Along the way, hornbeam columns and rammed-earth panels tap a visual rhythm, while their vertical architecture creates garden-room "walls" that cast intriguing shadows on the paths. Deep borders of late-blooming perennials, grasses, shrubs, and trees give Ratway plenty of room to experiment with plants.

Clipped hornbeam columns, which echo rammed-earth columns in the garden foyer (shown on the previous page), zigzag along the front walk, leading the eye to the door. "The pattern seems nonsensical," Ratway says, "but the columns have a relationship to one another—they're all the same distance apart, and as you walk through, they line up now and again." Chinese fringe tree, boxwood spheres, and a sinuous rosemary hedge add shades of green, while flanking hedges of *Taxus x media* 'H.M. Eddie' mark the threshold into the front garden. At left, 'Karl Foerster' feather reed grass introduces a wilder softness.



Above: A rear terrace lined with boxwood globes offers a scenic view of a swimming pond, created when fill dirt was excavated to level the home's foundation. Below the terrace, a rammed-earth retaining wall with arched grotto aligns with a concrete pier that Ratway uses as a diving platform.



"I'M TRYING TO CREATE A FEELING OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND—OF GOING THROUGH A PORTAL INTO ANOTHER WORLD."

Left: The rammed-earth walls and the cedar siding of the home connect the structure to the natural landscape. Thick mullions on custom windows and doors outline garden views from indoors. Next to the house, a plant-edged pond greens up a gravel patio outfitted with a rustic wooden table and airy steel chairs. A wood-burning Rumford fireplace adds ambience and warmth to chilly evenings spent outdoors.