

Perennial Edibles

"Perennial edibles" refers to plants like asparagus and chives (perennial plants that are edible) but also to the idea that there is always something to eat in a sustainable food garden.

For many people, gardening consists of a flurry of sowing and planting in spring, followed by an intensely busy harvest period in the fall. I realized that enjoyment and production both benefit if the work and the reward are spread out throughout more of the year. The idea of "always something to eat" (perennial edibles) is intended!

On the frost-free date where you live (the last date that a spring frost is likely), the less enthusiastic gardeners among us hurriedly dig and plant for about a week (here in zone 5, that happens around Memorial Day in the US, and around Victoria Day in Canada, towards the end of May). Then they tend, weed, water, and harvest whatever they have decided to grow. This type of garden will give you wonderful tomatoes, basil, corn, squash, and a good long list of other wonderful edibles, but it will not give you asparagus.

Asparagus takes a few years from seed before it will give you any significant amount of edible spears. You can get some nice strawberries in one season (from purchased plants) but you can get a delicious large crop of your own strawberries every year if you plant and manage a bed of strawberry plants. Apple, cherries, pears take more than a year to start to produce. A good crop of garlic this year was planted last year.

So there are more ideas here than food plants of a perennial habit or a long growth cycle. My ideas are:

- a permanent sustainable garden (best described as permaculture)
- a garden where you control the quality of what you grow to sustain yourself
- a garden that feeds you without dependence on external and fragile systems.