

Jardin Potager: Designing the Kitchen Garden Part I
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The history of the jardin (zhar den) potager (poe ta zhay) dates back to the Middle Ages when monasteries, out of necessity were self sufficient and grew their own food, herbs and medicines. Through time the kitchen garden, although largely based on historical models (particularly those of the French Renaissance) has evolved. The intent of the potager is convenience and year round harvesting: to walk out the door and cut the herbs you need for cooking or a bouquet of flowers to brighten the table or choose a few veges or fruits to center a meal around. Home-grown food suited for your family's unique preferences.

The potager design and site selection is vital. Think of it as an empty canvas or an extension of your home. It can be 'decorated' in a sense by choosing plants for texture, form and color. Another manner of décor is by cuisine. Perhaps Italian, French, Mexican or Asian cuisines are favored, plant accordingly. An area that welcomes 6 or more hours of sun is ideal. Many kitchen gardens have a central water feature. Raised beds are laid out in a practical, formal or artistic manner around it. The entire garden is surrounded by a hedge or fence for aesthetics or to keep pesky intruders out (oui, monsieur et madame deer that means you).

The use of space is important, but might be an issue in your design. If space is limited, think vertical. Use espaliered fruit trees that are trained to grow up against a fence or wall and trellises or poles for other vertical plantings. Additional issues to consider in designing your potager are crop rotation and companion plantings (**covered next week in Part II**). Knowing which plants grow well together and which plants need to be rotated from year to year is important to the success of your garden. With that in mind, in designing the potager, consider at least four beds for easy/logical four-year crop rotation.

Thorough planning is essential for a flourishing jardin potager. Take your time. Be creative, but wise. Bon jardinage!

NOTE: Yard and Garden Lectures begin 1/14/12 with Karen Page *Growing Fruits and Nuts on the Olympic Peninsula*. Info: 379-1172. Refreshments and Door Prizes!