

# Where the Sidewalk Ends: Beginning Troy's Edible Landscape

By Jessica Jean Olson  
Summer 2003

## **Vision**

If Troy Gardens is a "theme" park, one of its most important themes is that the earth is abundant, and delicious! Creating an Edible Landscape has been one of the community's goals since the planning process for Troy Gardens began in 1996. We envision a place where visitors can walk, taste and learn about some of the wonders of wild edible plants as they stroll along a beautiful, interpretive trail. This garden is the first step toward making our vision a reality. In the next few years we will replace the non-native, invasive plants growing along the western edge of the property with edible trees, berries, nuts and herbs, while leaving the large native maple and walnut trees already growing here. The edible landscape will reach from this garden to the northern property boundary. In time we will put in edible wild plants north of the Troy Community Farm. This edible, learning landscape will provide a transitional setting between the cultivated crops in the farm and gardens and the more naturalized prairie and woodland.

## **Site History**

As the remains of sidewalk and pieces of rubble placed around the site may suggest, this site has an interesting history of use. The sidewalk allows us to imagine a time when trains stopped nearby and passengers used this Maple tree-lined sidewalk for a stroll. Once trains stopped running through, the woodland grew up over the sidewalk and this site was used by the Central Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled as a lawn waste dump. Invasive plants took over the site as time went on, creating a thicket of honeysuckle and buckthorn beneath the trees. In the fall of 2002, the site was cleared of these invasive understory species and readied for the edible landscape project to begin. The pieces of stone and rubble that edge the garden are relics from the Central Center days and were salvaged from the dump.

## **Project Description**

Many layers of the community were involved in creating the garden before you. The Friends of Troy Gardens supported this project through the Learning Community Internship Program. Briana Meier at Urban Open Space Foundation served as my project sponsor and supervisor.

Starting in March 2003, students from Sherman Middle School spent their Wednesday afternoon's researching information on edible plant species and brainstorming site designs. In April, Shabazz High School joined the project. Students worked to finalize the design and prepare the site as part of a service learning class.

Shabazz students spent three Fridays out at the site, tilling it by hand, digging the paths and sheet mulching the beds. The students worked alongside volunteer community members to plant the majority of the site in May. Finishing touches and artistic work were completed in the with help from the Shabazz students, who continued work through the summer in order to fulfill their service learning class requirements.

In June, yet another group of youth got involved with the project. Participants in Friends of Troy Garden's Farm and Field Youth Training Program worked one morning each week pulling weeds and performing other maintenance tasks. The Farm and Field Program provides job-training, skill-building education, hands-on environmental education and service learning opportunities to youth. And of course adds another layer to the edible landscape project's community-orientated goals.

The last (but not least!) layer of community involvement is Troy Garden's staff. Intern Maggie Anderson spent countless hours on the project-- securing donations, supplies, and leading workdays. Executive Director Sharon Lezberg and Garden Coordinator Dan Durica assisted me with their gardening experience and resources. Finally, Restoration Manager Briana Meier worked alongside me through the entire process, helping with every aspect of the project (and then some!).

## **Landscape Layout**      *Do you see the snakes?*

The paths that lead you through the edible garden are laid out in the shape of two snakes with spiral tails whose heads meet in the center of the garden. Shabazz High School and Sherman Middle School Gardening Club created the garden design. During our meetings the students worked in small groups to create several design ideas and

then voted on the winner. The garden you see before you is a result of collaborative planning between the middle school and high school students. The garden is laid out into several "theme" beds. This brochure is designed to lead you through the landscape from South to North. To learn about certain beds or species of interest you may wish to jump around using the site map as your guide. Enjoy!

## **The Edible Plants**

Disclaimer: While everything in this garden is edible, we kindly ask you to touch and smell, rather than taste. While some parts of each plant can be eaten, other parts are not for human consumption, or must be cooked prior to ingestion. Also, even though there are several plant uses suggested, there may be more. Further, the medicinal uses are intended to provoke interest rather than remedy. We recommend that you consult a professional herbalist for serious consideration of use.

## **Teas and Drinks**

Everything in this bed can be used to make tea or in drinks. Several species of mint are on your right and left. Touch and smell them all! Can you find the chocolate mint?

### **1. Horsemint *Monarda punctata***

Similar to the *Mentha* species, horsemint is an aggressive grower found from Minnesota to Long Island. Unlike mint, horsemint prefers dry sandy soil, coastal plains, and prairies. The plants leaves are most readily used steeped in tea.

### **2. Silver Mint *Mentha longitolia***

Look for its silvery leaves to distinguish silver mint from the rest of the mints. Like most mints, this variety can be steeped into tea and attracts butterflies. *See #5 for more description.*

### **3. Catmint *Nepeta cataria***

Once a cultivated plant from Europe, catmint is now widespread in North America. The plants leaves can be eaten raw or steeped as tea. The plant also has various medicinal benefits to cats and humans. Some include, a cure for headaches and sleep extender. Interestingly, catmint oil can also be used as an insect repellent.

### **4. Chocolate Mint *Mentha piperita***

Chocolate mint is reminiscent of an Andes after-dinner chocolate mint in both taste and smell. Great dried and added to black tea or used by

itself, chocolate mint also makes a nice addition to chocolate deserts or a surprise addition to breakfast breads. To distinguish chocolate mint from the rest, look for a plant that has flowers open from the bottom up. Also, be on the lookout for bees and butterflies!

5(a). Mint *Mentha*

5(b). Spearmint *M. spicata*

These varieties of mint were brought over from Europe and have since escaped from cultivated gardens. The plant prefers wet areas and aggressively grows through the United States and up into Canada. Naturally, these varieties of mint make excellent teas. Mint's essential oil and leaves (steeped into tea) have medicinal use as a remedy for stomachache, colds, cough, and headache. Fresh leaves and sweetener blended with shaved ice (and optional bourbon) also makes for a tasty summer drink. Bees and butterflies enjoy all species of mint. Keep an eye out for the native mint species in this garden!

6. Lemon Balm *Melissa officinalis*

Native to Europe, lemon balm is naturalized throughout the United States and prefers sunny fields with rich, sandy, loamy soil. Part of the "Tea bed," infused leaves of lemon balm have several medicinal uses such as relief from colds, headaches, menstrual cramps, and nervous stomachs. The crushed leaves also help to heal wounds and insect bites. Along with tea, lemon balm is used as a culinary herb to add flavor in salads, soups and egg dishes. Lemon balm is also a key element in certain perfumes and cosmetics.

7. Bergamot *Monarda punctata*

Native to North America, this attractive plant thrives in rich soils and morning sunlight. We commonly see a product of this in the commercial world labeled 'oswego tea,' which is an infusion of its young leaves. Bergamot also attracts butterflies and bees. Interestingly, the plant shares the same family, Lamiaceae, as its neighbors in the 'tea bed' – the mints.

8. Borage *Borago officinalis*

Pick a few flowers to float in a cool summer drink, or toss them with your salad for lunch. The flowers and leaves are entirely edible on this hairy, interesting plant. Watch out for bees though, Borage is a tasty treat for them as well.

9. Chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile*

This perennial herb is most widely used as a tea when its tiny white flowers are dried and steeped. As all readers of *Peter Rabbit* know, chamomile tea has soothing qualities.

**Pizza and Pasta**

Everything in this bed can be used as in seasoning on Pizza and Pasta. Which one is the most fragrant?

10. Mexican Oregano *Lippia graveolens*

11. Cuban Oregano *Plectranthus amboinicus*

13. Greek Oregano *Origanum sp*

14. Italian Oregano *Origanum sp*

Native to the Mediterranean, oregano is an herbaceous garden species of the United States and prefers dry, well-drained soils. A part of the "Pizza and Pasta" bed, oregano is commonly used as a culinary herb in pasta sauces, meat dishes and more. The white and yellow flowering tops of the Italian and Mexican varieties can be used medicinally infused as a tea to help cure colds, stomach and gallbladder disorders, nervous headaches, irritability, and more. Chewing on the leaf, or rubbing on a drop of essential oil can be used for temporary relief of toothache. Can you find the Cuban oregano? (Hint: note it's thick, fuzzy leaves.) Smell each type, which is your favorite?

12(a). French Tarragon *Artemisia dracunculus*

12(b). Russian Tarragon *Artemisia sp.*

Native to the northern hemisphere, tarragon grows wild on plains, prairies, and dry slopes from British Columbia south throughout the western United States. Tarragon is best known as a culinary herb. Use some leaves to spice up your pasta dish! The plant can also be used as a diuretic and appetite stimulant.

**Herbs**

Every species in this bed is an edible herb.

15. Thyme *Thymus*

Native to southern Europe, thyme is widely cultivated in North America, where it escapes from cultivation occasionally. We commonly use the leaves of thyme to flavor tomato sauces. The herb is also used medicinally as a remedy to relieve coughing and insomnia and is also used in cosmetic products.

16. Woolly Thyme *Thymus pseudolanuginosus*

Look for tiny pinkish/purple flowers on this low-creeping plant to distinguish it from the rest.

17. Lemon Thyme *Thymus citriodorus*

Lemon thyme is a compact, upright shrub that grows to a height of 12 inches. The leaves are tiny and heart shaped, ringed with a splash of yellow. As the name implies, lemon thyme has a bit of a citrus tang, but is milder than most other thyme. This makes it a natural choice for seasoning seafood dishes and even sweets. The natural, volatile oils also work as a digestive aid. These same oils can be used in aroma therapy for the treatment of asthma.

18. Garden Sage *Salvia officinalis*

19. Purple Sage *S. officinalis purpurea*

Garden and purple sage is native to southern Europe, cultivated throughout temperate North America and occasionally escapes from gardens. This aromatic evergreen perennial grows in well-drained soils in sunny areas. The leaves can be used as an excellent seasoning for meat and vegetable dishes. The plant is also a good remedy to reduce excessive sweating and ease gas pain.

20. Fennel and Bronze Fennel *Foeniculum vulgare*

Native to North America, fennel thrives in dry fields and roadsides. Can you guess which species is "bronze fennel?" This graceful-looking perennial herb is basically used as a culinary herb. Its seeds can be used in fish and other dishes, its shoots and stalks can be eaten raw and cooked. A tea made from crushed seeds can be used to treat indigestion and muscle cramps. Did you know Sacajawea found fennel for Lewis and Clark?

21. Lemon Grass *Cymbopogon citratus*

Native to South Asia and Australia, this grass-like herb is used both culinarily and medicinally. Finely ground fresh lemon grass stalks and leaves can be added to curry *pastes*. Its fresh and lemon-like with a hint of rose fragrance goes well with poultry, fish and sea food. Lemon grass (fresh or dried) steeped into tea is also said to aid digestion, cramping, colic, flatulence, arthritis pain, and act as muscle relaxant for stomach and intestines.

22. French Lace Lavender *Lavendula dentata*

Lavender is native to the Mediterranean area and widely cultivated in gardens across much of the United States and occasionally escapes into the wild. The plant prefers dry, well-drained soils in sunny locations. It can be used in several culinary meat and vegetable dishes. Look for this plant in another section of the garden.

23. Chives *Allium schoenoprasum*

Native to Asia, the species is now cultivated in the United States on sunny sites with well-drained soils. The plant is most commonly used in culinary dishes. The florets can be sprinkled on salads, the leaves can be eaten raw or cooked into dishes and soups. Look across the path and you will notice a similar species. What do you think makes them similar? Chives also have health and medicinal properties as an appetite stimulant, digestion promoter, nutritive species containing iron and vitamins.

**Wild Edible Plants**

Each of these species can be found in the wild areas of Wisconsin.

24. Blueberry *Vaccinium sp.*

Native to the area, blueberry bushes are commonly found on wet or dry acidic soils, bogs, barrens, woods or thickets. The soil these bushes thrive in has an acidic additive to mimic the natural acidity they crave. The fruits are delicious fresh, cooked into a jam, or dried.

25. Lingonberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*

Lingonberry is a native evergreen shrub grows in moist, acidic soils from Massachusetts to Alaska. The small red berries can be eaten raw but they are tart. Lingonberry jam and syrups are good on meat dishes and pancakes.

26. Nodding Pink Onion *Allium cernuum*

Native to the area, nodding onion is found in rocky soil, open woods, and slopes. If you haven't guessed why this plant is similar to chives, it is because they are from the same genus and family--Allium, and onion! The bulbs, leaves, and bulbettes can be used cooked, pickled, and raw. Why do you think this flower is called nodding pink onion?

(Hint: what do the flowers do?)

27. Dotted Mint *Monarda punctata*

Native to the area, dotted mint is found throughout North America in ditches, wet fields, moist woods, on stream-banks, lakeshores, and on the perimeters of marshes and swamps. Not only are butterflies in general attracted to this plant, dotted mint is considered one of the top nectar plants for the endangered Karner Blue Butterfly.

This plant can be used just as the non-native mint species – as tea and in a mint julep.

28. Downy Sunflower *Helianthus mollis*

Native to North America, sunflower is now a field crop worldwide. The seed is the most used part of sunflower. The seeds are eaten toasted, and oil is extracted from the seed and used for cooking and cosmetics. Birds and butterflies are attracted to this tall spectacular plant. Watch the sunflower heads turn with the sun!

29. Purple Coneflower *Echinacea purpurea*

Native to North America, purple coneflower thrives in barrens, prairies, and other dry open places. Extracts of this hairy-leaved perennial herb are commonly used to help support the immune system. Dried roots can also be used as an anti-inflammatory.

30. Joe-Pye Weed *Eupatorium purpureum*

Native to the area, joe-pye weed thrives in marshes, ditches, shores, damp meadows and open, wet woods. The root of the plant has been used most prominently as a diuretic. Various American Indian tribes also utilized the leaves as a burn remedy.

*Wild edibles to be continued...*

## **Day-Lilies**

31. Day-Lily *Hemerocallis fulva*

Day-lily was introduced to the United States for gardening purposes. Today, the plant has escaped and is found in waste grounds throughout the area. To few people's knowledge, practically the entire plant is edible, as one can consume young shoots, flower buds, flowers and tubers on the day-lily. Try adding early shoots to salads or prepare like asparagus. Prepare young flower buds like green beans, or use fresh flowers to make fritters. Use fresh, withered, or dried flowers to season stew. Lastly, add crisp snow-white tubers found early in the year in salads, or prepare like corn.

*Turn around and go to the center circle...*

## **Wild Edible Plants**

32. Lavender Hyssop *Agastache foeniculum*

Also known as Anise Hyssop, this is one of the most aromatic plants of the prairie and savanna. Its crushed leaves smell like a mixture of mint and licorice. Bright purple flowers are displayed from late summer all the way into autumn. The attractive, nicely-textured foliage holds up beautifully until the coming of the first snows.

Infusing its leaves into tea or used as an essential oil, Lavender hyssop has several medicinal properties including headache remedy, bruise and cold sore treatment and digestion aid. The leaf can be used to flavor meat and vegetable dishes as well as attract butterflies and humming birds.

33. Wild Rose *Rosa carolina*

Wild rose is a prickly beauty of our prairie. The plant is native to the area, and thrives on rocky, dry sites. Wild rose has numerous uses. Its rose hips or berries can be eaten raw, stewed, or made into jelly in the fall. In the spring, young shoots can be cooked and eaten, while the leaves and stalks can be used for tea. Adjacent to the "health and body" bed, the plant has characteristics that reach across the path. One can use the rose hips to scent perfumes, lotions, and essential oils.

34. Jerusalem Artichoke *Helianthus tuberosus*

"Tuberous sunflower" may be a more appropriate name for Jerusalem artichoke, which neither comes from Jerusalem nor is an artichoke. Native to prairies, the plant is also found in wet places, open woods and thickets, streams, disturbed habitats, and roadsides. The roots can be eaten in fall, winter or early spring, cooked or raw.

### **Health and Body**

Every plant in this bed has a health or body aspect to its use.

35. French Lace Lavender *Lavendula dentate* (see entry #22)

36. Twinkle Twirl Lavender *Lavendula sp.*

37. Lavender *Lavandula officinalis*

Lavender is native to the Mediterranean area and widely cultivated in gardens across much of the United States and occasionally escapes into the wild. The plant prefers dry, well-drained soils in sunny locations. Lavender is mostly used as fragrance in soaps, perfumes, and more. The essential oil extracted from the flowering stalks can also be used for head pains, apoplexy, and muscle cramps.

38(a). Garden Sage *Salvia officinalis*

*See entry number 18 for description*

38(b). Clary Sage *Salvia sclarea*

Clary Sage is native to the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. In the United States, the plant is found in the garden and in the wild on sandy, dry soils. As a part of the "health and body" bed, Clary is well known for medicinal and other practical properties. Its chief importance is as a fixative in perfumes, to which it adds a lavender-like scent. The essential oil extracted from the flowering stalks are used for this. Herbalists also recommend using the solution of a moistened Clary seed to clear the eye of any grit or other foreign substances.

39. Lambs Ear *Stachys byzantina*

Native to Northern Turkey and Southern Iran, Lambs ear is a garden species in North America. In the wild, it thrives on rocky hills and scrub areas. The soft leaves of this plant can be used as a washcloth and to staunch wounds, hence the reason it is a part of the "Health and Body" bed.

### **Cultivated Edibles**

These edibles are crops cultivated for cash crops in the United States and world. Do you think any other plant in the landscape could belong in this bed?

40. Horseradish *Armoracea lapathifolia*

Horseradish thrives throughout North America on moist soil, and interestingly, the plant actually prefers waste grounds! Perhaps that is why the plant is doing so well here on a site that has been disturbed. The roots are the most commonly used part of the plant. Commercial horseradish is made by mixing grated roots with a little vinegar. The plant's young leaves can also be eaten as salad.

41. Asparagus *Asparagus officinalis*

Once strictly a cultivated plant, Asparagus escaped from our gardens and is now a wild plant found throughout central and eastern North America. The young shoots are delicious when steamed or boiled. Establishing an asparagus bed takes several years, so be patient as we wait for the first harvest!

## **Edible Woodland Plants**

This area represents the edible woodland understory plants. Soon Solomon Seal and Sensitive Fern will be planted here too.

### 42. Wild Ginger *Asarum canadense*

This dainty perennial is found in rich woods from Canada to Alabama. Look for a solitary bell shaped flower between and under the heart-shaped leaves of Wild Ginger. Just below the ground one can find long horizontal rootstock of this interesting edible plant. The rootstock can be used as commercial ginger when dried and crushed. Also it is possible to make candied ginger with rootstock: boil rootstock in water for an hour, simmer in sugar syrup for 25 minutes, and finally separate and dry.

## **Dessert**

The two species in this bed are the main ingredients for delicious desserts!

### 43. Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*

Strawberries are one of the most widely grown fruit in the United States, second only to apples. We planted both ever-bearing and June-bearing varieties.

Wild Strawberry is found throughout the USA and southern Canada except in arid regions. The preferred habitat is roadsides, open woods and old grassy fields. As most know, the berries of this plant can be eaten raw, or made into jams. Steeped leaves--fresh or fully dried -- can make a very mild tea.

### 44. Rhubarb *Rheum Rhabarbarum*

Rhubarb is native to the mountains of China and Tibet, and a popular cultivated crop throughout World. The thick, fleshy leaf stalks of this handsome plant are used for sauce and pie. Be sure not to eat the leaves, because they are poisonous.

## **Woody Edibles**

Each of these edible species is also woody, as in trees or shrubs! These plants are scattered throughout the garden...

45. Pixwell Gooseberry *Ribes hirtellum*

Native to the area, Gooseberries are found in openings in the woods, fields, rocky sites, and even swamps. The berries of Gooseberries are used fresh or dried, in jelly, pie filling, and fruit sauce. Try a ripe berry, but watch out for the thorns! Do you have a guess why one is planted by the walnut tree?

46. Raspberry *Rubus idaeus*

Native to the area, raspberries or more generally "brambles" are a tasty treat to find in the wild. Have you seen any berries in the woods at Troy? Look closely as you walk toward the road... The berries of brambles can be eaten raw, cooked into jelly, teas, and more.

47. Hazelnuts *Corylus americana*

Native to the area, Hazelnuts are perennial shrubs. The plant prefers sandy soils in prairies, barrens, grasslands, and forests. One can eat hazelnut raw or cooked. The nuts are not only relished by humans, but also by squirrels, foxes, woodpeckers and small rodents. Medicinally, the oil from the nuts can be used to cure toothache and sooth nerves.

48. Honey Locust *Gleditsia triacanthos*

The trees are remains from the thick overgrown woodlands that used to reside here. Honey locust trees produce long pods that are flattened and twisted. Can you pick out two locust trees? The thin pulp of un-ripe pods is sugary sweet when nibbled.

49. Black Walnut *Juglans nigra*

Black Walnut trees are native to the area, and produce edible nuts. These can be eaten raw or cooked. The roots of Black Walnut trees contain a toxin called juglone that affects certain species attempting to thrive adjacent to it. For this reason, plants we chose to plant around it are resistant to the toxicity. Mint and day-lilys are two such species – can you guess what other species are resistant to the toxicity?

## 50. Juniper *Juniperus* sp.

Native to the area, juniper is found on the rocky, poor soil in our region and north through Canada. The shrub is also found in the mountainous regions of Tennessee and Georgia. The fruits of juniper can be used as a seasoning in numbers meat and vegetable dishes, as well as fermented into gin. Medicinally, juniper can be used to relieve menstrual cramps.

### **Get Involved!**

To help create the Troy Edible Landscape and to find out more about Troy Gardens please contact Restoration Manager Briana Meier at [bmeier@uosf.org](mailto:bmeier@uosf.org) or 608-255-9877, x13 or the Friends of Troy Gardens at [troygardens.tds.net](http://troygardens.tds.net) or 608-240-0409.

### **Thank You!**

I would like to thank everyone involved in this project. The bright and creative students in Sherman Middle School's Gardening club helped get the project off to a good start with their enthusiasm and excitement. The Shabazz students worked tremendously hard every day they were involved. I was amazed at how much they accomplished each day and was thankful for teacher Gene Delacourt's ability to motivate the students. Were it not for the volunteers during the month of June, we probably would not have finished planting before the plants died. I owe the project's completion and maintenance to the Farm and Field students under the direction of Fawn Houck. Were it not for their assistance, the landscape would not be as aesthetically pleasing. Lastly, I would like to thank the project's principal assistants Briana Meier and Maggie Anderson. Their assistance throughout the project was essential, plentiful, and greatly appreciated! Thanks to all!

### **Sources**

Bremness, Lesley. The Complete Book of Herbs. 1988. Penguin Books Ltd. London, England.

Creasy, Rosalind. The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping. 1982.

Kindscher, Kelly. Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie. University Press of Kansas. 1987

Peterson, Lee Allen. Edible Wild Plants of Eastern/Central North America. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1977

Reader's Digest. Magic and Medicine of Plants. 1986. The Reader's Digest Association.