



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

# Locally Grown And Harvested

**Warning** – read no further if you are hungry! Many plants are crops that are grown and harvested to feed us. They provide breakfast foods, salads, appetizers, entrées, desserts, and of course, the in-between meal snacks. How many edibles can we successfully grow in Central Florida? With the right amount of land and growing conditions can the produce department become obsolete?

One challenge is having a wide variety of edibles ripening throughout the year. The stretching of harvest times for some plants is achieved with succession planting. Plant lettuce, spinach, radishes, string beans, and other vegetables a few weeks apart. Freezing, drying, or canning produce saves the harvest for future use. We dry cherry tomatoes and

store them in the refrigerator in plastic bags. After reconstituting them in the microwave (covered in water for one minute in a Pyrex bowl) they find their way into many meals. One year they were a hit when given as home grown holiday gifts.

Other challenges include the weather which can delay, speed up, or wipe out a crop. When the heat comes on strong, lettuce bolts and most tomatoes stop setting fruit. Insect and disease problems can reduce or eliminate a yield. Regular scouting for these problems and prompt treatment helps maintain plant vigor. When calculating harvest times, don't reference what is in the produce department unless it is grown locally. A greenhouse is ideal for extending the growing season since tender crops can be grown through frosty winters.

The following fruits or vegetables successfully grow here if there are proper growing conditions and care. They are not inclusive of what could be grown.

**Breakfast** – A bowl of fruit could include any of these fruits if they are in season: bananas, peaches, plums, strawberries, blueberries, pineapple, blackberries, citrus (oranges, grapefruits, kumquats, etc.), star fruit, persimmon, and papaya. Making a cereal from corn would be a major stretch so add fruit to store bought cereal or serve with yogurt.

**Lunch** – Try a salad with lettuce, spinach, tomato, cucumber, pepper, radish, olives, and avocado.

**Dinner** – A casserole including a bevy of vegetables: eggplant, string beans, squash, okra, scallions, and leeks. A side of beets, carrots, kale,

Swiss chard, cabbage, broccoli, or Brussels sprouts.

**Dessert** – Unless you have mastered growing cacao to make your own chocolate, see breakfast above.

**Snacks** – Mix up some guacamole from avocados or cure olives. Take ripe veggies and dry them to create savory snacks such as tomatoes and tomatillos and fruits such as bananas, peaches, blueberries, pineapple, and strawberries for sweet ones.

Growing a diversity of crops is the best strategy to obtain edibles throughout the year. However, even with multiple strategies in place to overcome the vagaries of growing edibles, produce departments (or many neighbors with green thumbs) are still needed to round out meals.

To determine planting dates use the Florida Fresh Veggie app. Enter your zip code, and the free app tells you what vegetables to plant at that time of year. Then tap photos for more information. Android: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=edu.ufl.ifas.planting>. iOS: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/florida-fresh/id1061646911?ls=1&mt=8>



Left: Star fruit grows on a medium sized tree. Middle: Broccoli is a good cool season crop. Small inset photo: Harvest pineapples when fragrant and turning golden in color. Right: Bright Lights Swiss chard adds pizzazz to the garden. Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.

Hortus Oasis (FL26000315) in Winter Park is a boutique garden design company specializing in residential, commercial and specialty gardens. Stephen is a registered landscape architect and Kristin is a certified landscape designer. Contact them at 407-622-4886/garden@hortusois.com

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88141 PRAD TPP 10/2016