

in the garden

BY STEPHEN AND KRISTIN PATEGAS

Vegetable Gardens ARE Pretty



Kristin and Stephen Pategas

Travel continues to inspire us in our garden. This summer we visited Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, VA (www.monticello.org) for the second time and were amazed with the beauty and functionality of the iconic vegetable garden. Back home as autumn approaches, Central Florida's prime vegetable growing season is upon us. The typical nematode-laced and

Tuteurs make a statement at Monticello

organic matter-deprived soils are less than ideal for these crops. Instead grow vegetables in raised beds or containers in a well-draining potting soil. If you plant in the ground, regularly add lots of organic soil amendments to deter the nematodes and add nutrients.

Above ground the garden could be as attractive as ...say, Monticello's. Helter skelter arrangements of beds and containers rarely do a garden justice. Here's how to use these edibles to enhance the whole garden. Select an area with good access to the house and that receives a minimum of six hours of direct sunlight a day. Lay out the beds (whether in the ground or raised) and the containers so there is plenty of space to tend them. Since stepping in the beds and compacting the soil is a no-no, our raised beds are four feet wide to provide reaching access from either side. Adjacent path widths are four feet so two can walk side by side and our garden cart is unimpeded.

Monticello's vegetable garden includes ornamental and functional plant supports. The tuteurs (four legged tripods) become vine covered vertical accents. Crisscrossing bare branches stuck into the soil can provide support to allow lower-growing edibles to scramble off of the ground. Providing height allows tighter plant spacing, easier harvesting, saves space, and decreases the area to weed, water, and maintain. Jefferson had it figured out.



Branches provide support for climbing vegetables



In France and England the potagers (kitchen gardens) we've seen include ornamental plant supports, benches, and perhaps a bower for vining edibles with a shaded seat beneath. While traveling in France, Jefferson was a keen observer and readily brought back ideas to his garden.

Florida's three vegetable growing seasons include summer's limited selection. See http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu/res_hort/pdf/files/vh02100_OC.pdf. The popular vegetables such as tomatoes, squashes, string beans, and cucumbers fade as the heat builds so plan ahead to keep the otherwise barren beds attractive. Plant evergreen ornamental plants to provide a year-round backbone. Then mix in colorful annuals and perennials to bridge the seasons. Turn helter skelter to pretty and functional and enjoy the bounty - visual and edible. Or just travel all summer.

Note: Check the Community Calendar for our Sept. 16 and Oct 2 programs. 🌿

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