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Homes & Property Outdoors

LOOKS GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT

Is it a kitchen garden or a garden kitchen? A star exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show combines cuisine with cultivation

Pattie Barron



THIS is the kitchen garden with kudos. Installed at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, and winning a Silver Medal, the Freshly Prepped Garden, measuring a scant 4m by 5m, has everything – including the kitchen sink, set in Italian granite, and a drinks chill cabinet. The back wall is a stunning patchwork of cut-and-come-again leaves so you can snip the pak choi or romaine lettuce just seconds before you serve the salad; an overhead arch is garlanded with Painted Lady runner beans to stir-fry on the spot, while strawberries dangle seductively from hanging colanders and lemons can be plucked off the tree for the essential G and T.

The kitchen garden of the future was created by Patricia Cox, whose Hertfordshire-based design company, Aralia, has been planting edibles at the



The Freshly Prepped Garden shows how, in the smallest of spaces, you can have a complete outdoor kitchen with a living wall of salad leaves

Pictures by Clive Nichols

I'm planting a vertical herb garden on the back of a client's garage wall

insistence of many customers. "I'm currently planting a vertical herb garden on the back of a client's garage wall, because he says it's ugly and needs camouflaging," says Cox. "This way, the wall will be functional as well as beautiful."

Usually, in such a small space, edibles would be packed in containers – but there is a smarter use of space here, exploiting the vertical as well as horizontal. Metal trays, with a drainage system and water reservoir to keep the plants perky, similar to green roof technology, are set into the tops of hardwood storage cupboards as well as behind the sink, and planted with edible gems such as pea shoot, small, circular carrot Parisier Market, Thai basil, giant red radish and radicchio.

The living wall, with foliage shades ranging from apple green to burgundy,

comprises a number of modular units with planting holes filled with rockwool – a lightweight, soilless compost – and inset with plug plants that grow perfectly, thanks to an irrigation system which incorporates a fertiliser.

"The units are black plastic but I sprayed them metallic silver so that even in winter they will make a striking sculptural feature. The beauty is that all you need to do through spring and summer is cut the leaves to encourage new growth; the irrigation system takes care of the feeding and watering," says Cox.

As in a high-spec, customised indoor kitchen, the surfaces are luxurious. Brazilian hardwood doubles as a glamorous work surface and durable giant chopping board. Matte granite is used on the utility side of the garden, glossy granite to highlight the breakfast bar area, which has space for three stools.

Together with banquettes covered in Manuel Canovas linen, just in front of a lollipop olive tree – an evergreen equivalent of box topiary – they give seating for five. Fruit trees, small-scale, flourish



Lemon trees, mizuna leaves and pea shoots flourish behind the kitchen sink (left), while celebrity chef Andrew Nutter cooks up a storm with fresh vegetables



along the sides of the garden, planted into deeper trays: lemon and calamondin orange, apple and pear maypoles, through which grow lemon-flowered nasturtiums, edible, of course.

ALONG the boundaries, stainless-steel troughs hold cabbages and chilli peppers. Deep-red watercress, grown on pebbles in a rectangular glass bowl, makes a display to outshine any contemporary flower arrangement. Cox has been picking at it throughout Chelsea week. "Watercress ideally should be grown in running water but we've managed it in still water. You can't buy the seed yet, because it's grown vegetatively, but you can buy it ready to eat at Waitrose."

You could even use this outdoor kitchen late at night. Overhead arches support LED lights that use less energy than one standard light bulb, making this bountiful kitchen garden green as well as gorgeous.

HOW TO GET THE LOOK

- Buy the garden: it is for sale at a price of around £30,000; for enquiries, contact Aralia (01279 730 040; www.aralia.org.uk)
- Install a modular system for a living wall: BioTexture Ltd (01243 641710; www.biotope.uk.com)
- Choose SenSa granite work surfaces: (www.cosentinogroup.net)
- Consult Neil Gaffan at Eco-Lutions for green garden lighting: (www.eco-lutions.co.uk; 01799 615015)



Deep red watercress makes a striking and edible table display

SEE IT BUY IT

It may be too late to sow seeds of some vegetables but not too late to buy baby organic veg plants to grow on, in pot or plot.

Rocket Gardens sells instant kitchen gardens so you can plant a potager in an afternoon. Kits include the windowbox garden (more than 70 plants from beetroot to basil, £24.99); the salad garden (more than 100 from rocket to spinach, £36.99), and the Mediterranean garden (with borlotti bean, courgette and aubergine, £36.99).

For the next fortnight, Rocket Gardens is offering Homes & Property readers 15 per cent off all their nine grow-your-own kits. To order, use code

HP09 at www.rocketgardens.co.uk. Offer closes 10 June. Allow up to 28 days for delivery.

See it: artist Lynette Hemmant opens her spectacular garden at 35 Camberwell Grove, SE5, this Sunday, 12-6pm, under the NGS Yellow Book scheme. Admission £2.50; children free.

■ The Islington Gardens Group opens on the same day, from 2-6pm. It comprises nature reserve Barnsbury Wood, a country-style garden at 44 Hemingford Road, old roses, clematis and alliums at 36 Thornhill Square and 1 Battlebridge Court, a canal-side plantsman's garden. Combined admission £6; children free.

