Incredible Edibles-Herbs in the kitchen Garden
By Gail Comer
Transylvania Exension Master Gardener

Kitchen gardens have been a fixture in many yards since pioneer days. It made sense to locate your edibles and seasonings close to the back door and the stove instead of out in the back forty. From that proximity you also could watch out for marauding wildlife and keep your eyes on the children.

In the last few years, the kitchen garden has made a resurgence as people decide it's a good thing to know where your food comes from and what kind of chemicals and pesticides participated in the growing process.

Tailgate and farmers markets got us interested in buying local and thinking about growing our own.

The kitchen garden can't always be right out the back door, but it can be incorporated into ornamental or flower gardens, or planted in containers on your porch or deck. Some gardeners are even turning that barren strip of grass by the curb into an edible oasis.

Try to locate your kitchen garden in the sunniest spot you can find as most herbs and veggies love at least 6 to 8 hours of full sun. I had a friend who planted her tomatoes in an old, deep wheelbarrow and chased the sun around the yard to get a full dose of vitamin-D for the plants. She also planted some small bush basils and a few marigolds which turned the wheelbarrow into quite a show piece, and tasty too.

Many of us think of an herb garden as a formal clipped knot of plants that shouts high maintenance to keep it looking pristine. These days we are using the art of intermingling our herbs into flower gardens and containers to add festive shades of green, silver and gold on hardy strong plants that resist most pests and diseases.

When growing herbs in containers, remember to use high quality potting soil and make sure that the drainage is good. Many herbs come from the Mediterranean, like it hot and dry. They never, ever want wet feet.

Good air circulation is also beneficial, so be careful not to stuff the pot too full.

If you are going to plant a large pot make sure the herbs you choose all need the same soil and water conditions. Rosemary, lavender, sage, and thyme do well together. They are all perennials and should winter over if mulched and kept in a protected southern location. Don't forget they do not want to be over-watered.

Annual herbs like basil and dill should not go into the ground until the soil is warm. If you want to grow them in pots, make sure you do a lot of pinching to keep them bushy. Some herbs are very invasive, so put them way out in the back forty or grow them in containers. Mint, lemon balm, creeping oreganos make lovely lush pots. Use your pinchings to flavor ice cubes and in marinades.

The Transylvania Master Gardeners are sponsoring three programs on Kitchen Gardens at Silvermont on May 14, June 18, and July 16th from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.. The programs are free and no preregistration is required.
Check the Transylvania Times for further details or contact the Cooperative Extension office at 884-3239.

Garden Box for May

- Plant trees and shrubs, ground covers, annual flowers and bedding plants. Sensitive plants can be safely planted after the third week in May.
- Prepare beds for annuals with compost, composted manure or soil conditioner. Add a time-released fertilizer of 10-15-10 or one to encourage bloom 11-40-06.
- Fertilize ornamentals as needed.
- Fertilize crape myrtles and Rose of Sharon with one cup of 10-10-10 per plant for abundant summer bloom with additional application in June & August. Spray with insecticidal soap, oil or chemical for aphids as needed. If mildew occurs, apply Benomyl or Bayleton.
- Fertilize grape vines, blackberries and blueberries
- Fertilize vegetables 6 weeks after planting

Do you have a question for the Transylvania Extension Master Gardeners or a subject you'd like to see addressed in this column? E-mail us at manymoons@citcom.net or have your garden questions answered at our telephone clinic from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays, March through October. Call 884-3239 or walk-in during those hours at the Community Services Building, 98 E. Morgan St. The Transylvania Extension Master Gardener program is sponsored by the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service: www.transylvania.ces.ncsu.edu.