

## Living off the land

Edible landscaping may just be the next big thing in add-on business opportunities.

**A**S THE IDEA of homegrown fruits, vegetables and herbs gains ground in American homes, a service offering of “edible landscaping” is beginning to crop up among residential landscapers.

But for Shannon Hathaway, president of Green Heron Landscaping Inc., in Cary, NC, edible landscaping is *not* a new concept. Her interest in it began as a little girl with her grandmother and mother’s gardens.

“My grandmother had a vegetable garden that was bigger than I’d ever seen, and I loved walking through it when I was a kid,” Hathaway recalls. “My mom’s garden focused more on herbs, so I also got a taste of growing a successful herb garden as just a kid.”

While studying landscaping in college, Hathaway fell under the tutelage of an instructor who emphasized living off the land. So it was no surprise that she offered the service when she started her business.

Hathaway says she has found it’s not a terribly hard sell. The lush climate of the region certainly helps, as does consumers’ increasing interest in their food’s origins.

“There’s definitely more interest for this lately, and I find a lot of clients come to me and ask for it. But I also suggest it every time I meet with a client for the first time,” she says. “Even if they’re certain they don’t want fruits or vegetables, a lot of people love the idea of fresh, homegrown herbs.”

Incorporating the produce into the existing landscaping is also beneficial for the plants. The produce is much more lush and healthy.

“If you incorporate your fruits and vegetables in your borders and beds, it allows you to rotate your crops more easily — and you’re not completely exhausting the soil by doing so many vegetables in just one small plot of land,” says Hathaway.

Hathaway says that offering edible landscaping goes hand-in-hand with her company’s Green Movement focus and



“Edible things can be beautiful,” says Shannon Hathaway.

has contributed to its success.

“We have found a real niche in the Green Industry by offering edible landscaping, which is part of our overall green focus,” she says. “We don’t use chemicals, and we try to educate our clients on other ways of growing. We’re reminding people that edible things can be beautiful — and that growing your own fruits and vegetables and living off the land is a wonderful thing.”

Because the company is based in suburban Raleigh, one challenge has been working with homeowner association (HOA) rules, which can be restrictive. But Hathaway says she has found ways to work with these rules and still incorporate edible landscaping into the property. Interestingly, she says that an influx of various ethnicities moving to the region has actually helped push the movement.

“We’ve had a number of clients from India who have moved into our region and are expecting the land to produce, because that’s what they’re used to,” says Hathaway. “They realize that we live in such a lush area and that you can grow a lot here, and they expect that to happen. They’re bringing their traditions of using the land for food production — and reminding many of us of our own past. It’s really helped drive the movement for more edible landscaping.”

In the Raleigh region, Hathaway says that fruit like plums, pears, figs, peaches, pomegranates and persimmons really thrive. There is also a large variety of vegetables and herbs that do well in the climate.

“It’s a wonderful region for growing, so it makes sense that more clients are showing interest,” she concludes. “I think it will only continue to grow.”

The author is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering landscaping.

### >> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

**COMPANY:** Green Heron Landscaping Inc.

**HEADQUARTERS:** Cary, NC

**FOUNDED:** January 2002

**NO. OF EMPLOYEES:** 6 full-time, 1 part-time

**CLIENTELE:** 99% residential

**2011 REVENUE:** \$400,000

**2012 PROJECTED REVENUE:** \$450,000

#### WHY EDIBLE LANDSCAPING?

“My interest in it started as a kid and only grew as I studied landscaping. I try to bring the concept of ‘living off the land’ into as many landscapes as I can.”

**INVESTMENT?** “There is no added cost to the landscaper to offer edible landscaping to clients, and most wholesale nurseries offer fruit trees and herbs.”