Edible Ornamentals/Unusual Edibles

With more people interested in edible landscaping, uncommon fruits and edibles are coming into their own. Some familiar, ornamental plants have wonderful fruit or unusual berries. Aronias (chokeberries), for example, are well worth incorporating into your garden for both their beauty and their edible berries. Also, don't overlook the decorative qualities of traditional fruit and herbs! Figs, persimmons, espaliered fruit trees, berries, and grapes can all be added to your landscape, while many herbs make wonderful additions to borders and planters. See Sky's Fruit Tree List and Berry Information Sheets for detailed descriptions of our more conventional edible selections.

Many flowers grown primarily as ornamentals are also edible. Roses and violets are noted below, but other edible flowers include daylilies, nasturtiums, and many more.

Please note: plants grown and sold commercially primarily as ornamentals, such as rose bushes, daylilies, and flower starts such as pansies, may possibly have been treated by growers with chemicals not registered for use on edible plants. If a plant you purchase has not been grown specifically as an edible, wait a year after planting to harvest from it. In our detailed list that follows, plants Sky purchases **solely** as edibles are starred. Here at the nursery, tables and beds marked "edibles" contain only plants grown specifically for consumption; they are all safe to harvest their first season. For example, we get the elderberry (Sambucus) variety 'Bob Gordon' for its berries, 'Black Beauty' for its ornamental foliage. They will be in different beds of the outdoor nursery. Similarly, violas grown organically for eating will be near the vegetable starts, while those grown for display are with other flowers.

Many edible ornamental trees and shrubs have roughly similar cultural requirements. Unless otherwise noted, they produce best in full sun and rich, moist soil that drains well. Make sure the garden bed has plenty of organic matter; work in 3" of Cedar Grove Compost, Fertil-Mulch®, or other good compost to prepare the soil. Weeds, lack of ample water, and birds will limit yields. Mulching with compost or bark will limit competition from weeds and conserve moisture. Most of these plants will produce well if fertilized once a year with organic rose and flower food. Huckleberries, tea camellias, lingonberries, salal, and wintergreen prefer organic rhododendron food. Follow the package directions according to the size of the plant.

It can be hard to find edible plants for shady areas. Most of the following plants produce better in full sun but will tolerate partial shade. The italicized plants prefer partial or afternoon shade.

Shrubs: aronia, currant, elderberry, gooseberry, honeyberry, red huckleberry, *evergreen huckleberry, Oregon grape*, serviceberry, tea camellia, some bamboos

Groundcovers: alpine strawberry, lingonberry, salal, *violets, wintergreen*

There are many excellent books on edible landscaping for those interested in more information.

GROUNDCOVERS

***Alpine strawberry** (F*ragaria vesca*)
This European strawberry may have tiny berries, but oh, the flavor! It's a nicer groundcover than regular strawberries, too, with its finer foliage and more controlled expansion. Sometimes white-berried forms are available: equally tasty, but more unusual than the red. For a French treat, drop a few berries in your next glass of champagne. Alpine strawberries tolerate shade better than the larger strawberry cultivars, but they produce best when given full sun, rich soil, and yearly feeding.

***Lingonberry** (V*accinium vitis-idaea*)
You don't have to go to Ballard for your lingonberry syrup if you grow your own. Lingonberries spread nicely through underground rhizomes. Growing 6-12" tall, its small glossy leaves, white flowers and bright red berries make it a nice groundcover for a sun to part-shaded area. It loves the same conditions as camellias and rhododendrons.

Salal (G*aultheria shallon*)
Salal berries were so highly prized by the indigenous people that they were sometimes used as trade items! The plump dark blue fruit has a somewhat mealy texture and tastes rather like a blueberry (its distant cousin). It's pleasant for fresh eating, can be dried, and made into jelly, preserves, pies.... Don't let the birds get ALL your crop anymore! As an evergreen groundcover, this sturdy and attractive native stays low in sun, grows taller in shade, and tolerates neglect.

Violets (*Viola species*)
All violet species, including sweet violets, wild perennial violets, pansies, Johnny-jump-ups, and violas, have edible flowers and leaves. The flowers typically have a slightly minty flavor; the leaves are blander, tasting a bit like lettuce. Perennial violets and violas will spread by seed or underground stolons; most have attractive heart-shaped leaves that will be evergreen in milder winters. An excellent groundcover for a shady area or woodland garden! Sky typically carries some viola starts grown organically specifically for eating. These ones may be harvested freely their first season.

Wintergreen (G*aultheria procumbens*)
This beautiful Eastern U.S. native is a close relative of salal. The plant looks rather like a tiny salal with brighter green leaves; the berries are shiny, red, and have that refreshing wintergreen flavor. A favorite with children! Give it woodland conditions.

GRASSES

Bamboo (P*hyllostachys* species)
Among Sky's bamboo selection are several that produce abundant, tasty shoots. All edible bamboos are "running," meaning they'll spread vigorously if not contained by a bamboo barrier. Depending on variety, bamboo canes can reach 10-80' and take sun or part shade. See Sky's current Bamboo List for full descriptions of all varieties carried this year—those with tasty shoots are so noted.

SHRUBS

Aronia/ Chokeberry (A*ronia melanocarpa*)
This American native is valued for its tasty and nutritious fruit. Aronia juice is tart, tasty, and high in Vitamin C. The 4-6' plant is also very ornamental. It has glossy, thick foliage, which turns fire engine red in October. In spring it is covered with snowy white flowers. The blue-black berries can hang on the plant well into winter if you don't eat them first. The fruit is eaten fresh or used in juice or preserves. The plant adapts to most soils, takes full sun to partial shade, is hardy to -40° F, and is rarely bothered by pests and diseases.

Currant/Gooseberry (*Ribes species*)
Currants and gooseberries are widely grown in the UK and Europe. Gooseberry bushes grow about 4-5' tall, are thorny, and are one of the first plants to leaf out in the spring. Gooseberry fruit is tart; it's usually cooked and served in pies or preserves. Berries can be red, white/green, pink, or black. Currant berries come in a similar range of colors; the red and white varieties have the mildest flavor and can be eaten fresh. The bushes are more upright than gooseberries, usually thornless, and can be grown as an edible hedge. Varieties carried at Sky are usually self-fertile. They grow in full sun or partial shade and tolerate some drought, but you get best fruit production in full sun with regular watering.

Elderberry (*Sambucus* species)
Elderberries have been eaten in Europe, Asia, and America for millennia. The deciduous bushes grow like lilacs, with 6-15' arching branches that can be kept smaller with pruning. June sees large, flat, ornamental clusters of tiny flowers, followed by black berries in September. For best fruit production, you need two varieties for cross-pollination. The ripe berries make delicious preserves, pies, wine, or juice; they should not be eaten raw as they can cause nausea. Flowers can be eaten in fritters. There are toxic compounds in leaves and other plant parts, so do not eat them. Sky carries several varieties bred for high quality berry production. Many ornamental varieties will also produce small crops.

***Goji** aka **Chinese Wolfberry** (*Lycium barbarum*)
Chinese wolfberry grows as a shrub to semi-vine, reaching 8-10 feet high. It has purplish-blue flowers in spring followed by orange-red berries. The berries taste a bit like raisins; the leaves and young shoots can be eaten as a green vegetable. Berries and bark have been used in Chinese medicine for over 2000 years. Western studies confirm that goji berries are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Goji likes full sun and well-drained soil. It is drought resistant and easy to grow.

***Honeyberry** (*Lonicera kamchatika* aka *L. caerulea var. edulis*)
This member of the honeysuckle family offers tasty small blue fruits that look rather like elongated blueberries. It likes sun to partial shade and rich organic soil. The arching (3-4' high by about 5-6' wide) bushes have creamy white to yellow flowers in early spring, followed by the bright berries in early summer. Sky carries several cultivars; pick two different varieties to ensure cross-pollination.

Huckleberry (*Vaccinium* species)
This Northwest favorite needs little introduction! Sky Nursery carries the evergreen huckleberry (*V. ovatum*), a stunningly ornamental plant with shiny dark evergreen foliage; florists often use its cut branches in arrangements. Its berries resemble blue-black, tart blueberries, and are rich in antioxidants. Huckleberries do well in shade but produce more abundantly in sun. They are shallow-rooted; try not to mulch too deeply or to cultivate around the roots.

Oregon Grape (*Mahonia* species)
You've admired the purple-black berries on this plant, but did you realize that they're completely edible? The tart fruit is best sweetened; it makes excellent juice and jelly. The shiny holly-like evergreen foliage, fragrant yellow flowers in late winter, and fall berry display make this a superlative ornamental. Give it rich well-drained soil and part-shade for best performance.

***Pineapple Guava** (*Feijoa sellowiana*)
This evergreen shrub has attractive foliage—large leathery leaves with silver underside –but what's spectacular about it is the large flowers. They have fleshy white petals and bright red stamens; bees and hummingbirds love them, and they are edible, tasting like cinnamon cotton candy according to Raintree. The fruit requires a hot summer to ripen (or keep the shrub in a container and bring indoors to finish ripening); it tastes like pineapple crossed with guava with a hint of mint, hence the name. Pineapple guava is hardy to about 15°F and will grow about 10 feet tall and wide.

Rose *(Rosa* species)
Many species roses, including the natives and most rugosa roses, bear rose hips which are excellent Vitamin C sources. They are most commonly dried and used to brew rosehip tea, but can also be cooked and eaten or used in jams. Ounce for ounce, they contain more Vitamin C than oranges, as well as valuable bioflavonoids.

Salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis)
This Northwest native raspberry relative is prized by indigenous people both for its berries and its young shoots, which can be peeled and cooked like asparagus. Salmonberry grows as a 6' upright prickly shrub and will form thickets if allowed to spread in an open area, providing habitat for birds and small mammals. The sweet-tart berries can be either salmon-red or golden when ripe. Flowers are a showy pink-purple and attract hummingbirds.

***Seaberry** (*Hippophae rhamnoides*)
This Far Eastern plant is a stunning performer! It is extremely tough and hardy, tolerating drought, salt spray, and poor or sandy soils. (It dislikes wet soils.) An excellent hedge plant growing to 10', it has narrow grayish-green leaves and is literally covered with bright orange berries that persist into winter. The berries are very tightly held; the easiest way to harvest them is to cut entire branches, stick them in the freezer, and shake off the frozen berries. They make excellent juice and smoothies. Seaberry juice contains 7 times the Vitamin C of oranges or lemons, plus vitamins A & E. The seeds contain oil used medicinally. You'll need one male plant to pollinate up to 8 female plants. Note: the plant wants to sucker and spread. Plant where that tendency is desirable.

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier*)
An American native with a wide range, this plant was used extensively by early settlers for preserves. Canada has started growing the fruit commercially, though it's not readily available yet in our country. The fruit looks like a tiny blue apple and tastes rather like a blueberry. It can be eaten fresh, dried as "raisins", or used in pies and preserves. Different cultivars are available; some can be trained as a small tree, some as a large bush. The plant will be covered with white flowers in late spring, with berries in July, and with bright yellow foliage in the fall—a good multi-season plant!

***Sichuan (Sechuan, Szechuan) Pepperbush** (*Zanthoxylum simulans*)
This handsome deciduous shrub or small tree is the source of the pink Sichuan "peppercorns" used in Asian cooking. Like Japanese pepperbush, the young leaves and shoots are also used for salad greens and in soups and stews. It is a great ornamental, with dark green ferny foliage that is aromatic when bruised. Fragrant yellow-green flowers in May are followed by red fruit. Fall color is a clear yellow. It takes sun to part shade, grows to about 7' tall, and likes rich soil that retains moisture. Said to be self-fertile, but you'll get better berry production with two plants.

***Tea Camellia** *(Camellia sinensis)*
Yes, true tea—green, black, or oolong—comes from a close cousin of ornamental camellias. Like them, tea camellia is a beautiful evergreen that grows well in the Pacific Northwest. Tea camellia can grow to 6-8'. Its leaves are narrow, dark, and glossy, and the fragrant, pearly white single flowers appear in the fall. Tea camellia likes full sun to partial shade, well-drained soil rich in organic matter, and yearly feeding with rhododendron food. Sky has an information sheet on how to pick and process your own green tea; black tea or oolong require a special curing process.

Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus)
Another Northwest native raspberry relative, thimbleberries are like small, flat, jewel-red raspberries. They are very soft, with a sweet-tart flavor. They are good in jams if you can keep from eating them all fresh! Unlike most of their relatives, thimbleberry plants have no prickles. The foliage looks like large hairy maple leaves, and the flowers look like a small white wild rose.

VINES

Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)
Hops are vigorous, hardy plants that produce scented flowers essential to beer brewers. The golden hop vine is grown primarily for its ornamental foliage. Sky also carries green-leaved cultivars bred for flower production and brewing quality. Typical brewing varieties include Cascade, Centennial, Mount Hood, Nugget, and Willamette. Hops will die back to the ground in winter and grow up to a foot a day under ideal conditions in summer, reaching up to 25 feet. They like full sun, rich soil, plenty of water during the growing season, a good strong support, and plenty of room to stretch vertically. They will reward you with luxuriant-looking foliage and fragrant light-green flowers that can be used for sleep pillows or for brewing beers and ales.

***Kiwi** (*Actinidia* species)
Kiwis are vigorous growers that will reward the adventurous gardener with an abundance of fruit. Being deciduous, they are great grown over an arbor or large trellis screen for summer shade. Most varieties have glossy green leaves. Several species thrive in our climate. The supermarket fuzzy kiwi is *Actinidia deliciosa. Actinidia arguta*, the hardy kiwi, is smaller and smooth-skinned, but equally sweet and delicious. Most kiwis require a male plant to pollinate each eight females. However one variety, 'Issai' is partially self fertile. See Sky's current Kiwi Information Sheet for details on the different cultivars we're carrying and for information on growing and training the kiwi vines.

***Magnolia Vine (*Schisandra* species)**
This beautiful deciduous vine will grow in either sun or shade. The flowers are like small fragrant magnolias. The fruits are bright red and borne in grape-like clusters. They are highly aromatic and tart, used in beverages and preserves. The lemon-scented leaves and shoots are used in China to make a refreshing tea. It is hardy to about 10° F; you should mulch it if temperatures drop lower. 'Eastern Prince' is a white-flowered form which is self-fertile.

TREES

Bay Tree (Laurus nobilis***)**
This aromatic broadleaf evergreen makes a great accent in a bed or a container. Its natural habit is to grow as a small (10-15' in the Northwest) pyramidal tree, but it can also be trained as a topiary or even sheared as a hedge. In a container it will usually stay smaller and more shrubby. The dark green, glossy foliage is highly aromatic, and the leaves are the true bay leaves used in cooking.

Cornelian Cherry (*Cornus mas*)
This dogwood relative has been grown for its fruit in Greece and Eastern Europe for thousands of years, but has more typically been grown in America as an ornamental. The fruit is olive-shaped, red, rather like a tart cherry in flavor but with a drier texture. The fruit ripens over a long period. Cornelian cherry grows as an attractive small tree (to about 15-25 feet); its starry yellow flowers light up the late winter landscape, and it has attractive fall foliage.

***Filbert/Hazelnut** (*Corylus* species)
Filberts are handsome, rounded small trees, generally growing 10-20 feet tall; they can also be planted about four feet apart and pruned as shrubs to form a 6-10 foot tall edible hedge. Yellow catkin flowers provide interest in late winter. Filbert nuts are small, round to acorn-shaped, and sweet. The Northwest native hazelnut does produce nuts, but for the tastiest nuts and best resistance to Eastern filbert blight, get our named varieties, which have been bred for flavor and disease-resistance. Filberts require cross pollination, and not all varieties are cross compatible, so plan on choosing varieties that will pollinize each other. They are wind pollinated, so plant your filberts within fifty feet of each other with no obstructions. Commercial orchards are usually planted at a 20 foot spacing with pollinizer varieties every third tree.

Indian Plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*)
Another Northwest native, Indian plum heralds early spring with drooping clusters of tiny almond-scented flowers. A large shrub to small tree, Indian plum has dark green, lance-shaped leaves. Small blue-black fruits are relished by birds and good in jelly. The suckering shrub grows 3-15' tall depending on conditions.

***Medlar** (*Mespilus germanica*)
Medlars have been grown in Europe for centuries but are little known in America. They are attractive small trees (to about 10 feet), covered in spring with flowers that look like white wild roses. The 1" fruit is collected in fall after the first frost while they are still hard. Place them in a cool lighted place for a few weeks to undergo a process called "bletting." They become soft, spicy, and very rich, like cinnamon spiced apple sauce. They can then be eaten raw or made into great jelly, pies, or preserves.

***Mulberry** (*Morus* species)
Mulberries are ornamental trees with lush, tropical-looking foliage. The fruit is like a large, juicy, sweet blackberry. The trees will reach 30 feet in height and spread, but they can be kept smaller with pruning. Mulberries like at least a half day of sun (all day is better) and well-drained soil. Mulch to prevent freeze damage; hardy to about 10° F. Mulberries may be harvested while red for a tarter berry, or left to ripen fully for greater sweetness.

***Olive** (*Olea europea*)
Olive trees are picturesque, stately evergreens hardy to about 10° F. They require full sun and well-drained soil. In warm summers, early-ripening varieties should ripen fruit. Olives are great for their oil or cured with salt. For maximum ripening, plant against a south or west-facing wall in full sun.

Pine (*Pinus* species)
Edible pine nuts, or pignoli, are produced by all species of pine. However, most produce nuts or crops that are too small for most foragers to bother harvesting. The Korean stone pine (*Pinus koraiensis*), however, is one of the world's three foremost commercially harvested pine-nut producers, and it is also a beautiful ornamental. Another good pine-nut producer is the Siberian stone pine (*Pinus cembra spp. siberica*). Pines will ultimately grow into large trees, but these two varieties are both slow-growing.

***Quince** (*Cydonia oblonga)*
Back when everyone made jelly or preserves, quince was a part of every farm's orchard for its aromatic, high-pectin fruit. A gnarled small tree or large shrub, quince is a great ornamental as well. It is covered with fragrant white flowers in the spring and golden fruit in the fall. Check our fruit tree list for this year's varieties!

***Walnut** (*Juglans* species)
Walnuts are great nut trees for people with a lot of space. The majestic, spreading trees grow up to 60 feet tall. Many plants have trouble growing under walnuts because of chemicals the tree exudes; read a permaculture guide's "walnut guild" for recommended underplantings. Walnuts are self-fertile, but will produce more nuts with cross-pollination.