

## *The Beauty of Perennial Edibles*

### *Resource Sheet*

#### 1. **Pawpaw** (*Asimina triloba*)

##### Culture

Part sun to full sun (best as an understory tree)

Grow 14-20' tall. Can be trained to a single-stem tree or allowed to spread by suckers.

Well drained, slightly acidic soil

Require cross-pollination from another tree

##### Noteworthy Characteristics

Pawpaws are an understory tree native to mid-Atlantic woodlands, despite being related to some tropical fruits. The tree is almost tropical in appearance with broad leaves and mango-like fruits that ripen from green to yellow in September. In the early spring, the red-brown flowers are interestingly unusual and are pollinated by flies and some bees. The fruits are prone to falling off the tree before ripening up, so be sure to keep an eye on them and pick them up if they fall. The custardy flesh can be enjoyed fresh, or is a great addition to desserts, smoothies and milkshakes. It has even become popular to add to beer! Cultivars such as 'Shenandoah' and 'Mitchell' tend to be better producers.

#### 2. **Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier sp.*)

##### Culture

Full sun to part shade

Tolerates dry and wet soil

15-20' in height

Susceptible to many rose-family diseases, including cedar-apple rust and fire blight

##### Noteworthy Characteristics

Commonly planted as a street tree, serviceberry has become a popular small native tree. It also goes by the name: juneberry, shadbush, and saskatoon. It has lovely white blooms in the early spring, followed by small purple fruits in June, and then brilliant fall color. The fruits are often devoured by birds or ruined by cedar apple rust, but the plant makes a lovely landscape and wildlife tree either way.

#### 3. **Elderberry** (*Sambucus spp.*)

##### Culture

Full sun to part shade

Tolerant of most soils

Sprawling shrub 8-15' tall can spread vigorously by suckers. Give this plant plenty of room or dig out the suckers regularly



During the dormant season, remove canes which are more than 2 years old

#### Noteworthy Characteristics

Elderberries are very easy to grow. New cultivars with purple and chartreuse foliage are available for ornamental use, but straight species are great for fruit production. They make a large and attractive shrub in the landscape and attract many pollinators and birds. In spring, the lacy white flower heads can be harvested and used to make floral syrups and teas. In the late summer, clusters of purple berries can be harvested that are both and medicinal, but they should be cooked or dried before eating.

#### **4. Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)**

##### Culture

Full sun to part sun

Acidic soil required (pH 4.5-4.8). Test you soil before planting and amend with sulfur accordingly.

High organic matter

Prune out old stems that are 5+ years old to rejuvenate.

Plants will produce 20+ years if properly cared for.

Need to be covered with bird exclusion netting if a harvest is desired

##### Noteworthy Characteristics

Another native shrub, blueberries have many ornamental characteristics that make them a great landscape plant. Precious white bell-shaped flowers in spring give way to edible fruit and then bright red foliage in the fall. A wide range of cultivars can extend the harvest through the summer. New compact varieties make attractive edible hedges.

#### **5. Gooseberry (*Ribes spp.*)**

##### Culture

Full to part sun. Avoid south facing slopes, as too much direct sun will burn plants

Well-drained soil with high organic matter

Prone to white pine blister rust

Require good air circulation to prevent disease, space 3-4' between plants

Prune out central canes in dormant season to maintain an open center

##### Noteworthy Characteristics

Gooseberries and other *Ribes* species such as currants and jostaberries are small shrubs that fit well into the edible landscape. They can be trained into cordons or kept in a shrub form. They require little maintenance beyond annual pruning to encourage good air circulation. The fruit can be a little seedy and may be enjoyed by birds. *Ribes* are one of the hosts of white pine blister rust, a disease which affects white pine trees and has caused the planting of gooseberries to be banned in some states.



**6. Honeyberry (*Lonicera caerulea*)**

Culture

Part sun to full sun

Well drained soil

Requires another variety for cross pollination, be sure to choose a variety that blooms at the same time

Space plants 5' apart

Will be productive 30+ years

Only need pruning to remove dead wood

Noteworthy Characteristics

Honeyberries are a new addition to Longwood's ornamental kitchen garden this year. They are a honeysuckle shrub, but are not invasive like many of their cousins. They require little maintenance and thrive best in part shade. The fruits are large and juicy blue berries. Planting early and late varieties will extend your harvest window.

**7. Hardy Kiwiberry (*Actinidia arguta*)**

Culture

Full sun to part shade

Average well-drained soil

At least one male plant needed for fruit set on female vines

Requires a strong trellis to support a long-lived woody vine

Prune hard during winter by cutting back each stem to 8-10 buds, head back long vines in summer to manage excessive growth

Noteworthy Characteristics

This twining woody vine is an excellent edible landscape plant. It has attractive foliage and truly delicious fall fruit that looks and tastes even better than a true kiwi, but in a smaller fuzz-free package. The plants grow vigorously and will last many years, so a sturdy long-term trellis is needed. Forget about growing wisteria- a wooden pergola, arbor, or fence is the perfect home for this ornamental edible.

**8. Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*)**

Culture

Full sun to part shade

Average well-drained soils

Drought tolerant

Tendrils climber, trellis required

Aggressively spreading perennial vine, spreads by suckers and will sprout from root fragments

Difficult to get rid of once established



### Noteworthy Characteristics

Native vine dies to the ground in winter and quickly resprouts in spring. Bears many showy flowers in summer followed by edible passionfruits, also known as “maypops.” Mature to a yellow color in the fall and can be eaten fresh.

## **9. Black Raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*)**

### Culture

Full sun

Plant in well-drained soil with high organic matter

Need to be trellised

Plant 18-24” apart

Floricanes are second year canes which bear fruit, Primocanes are the first-year canes which bear fruit the following season.

After harvest, cut back floricanes to the ground and tip back primocanes to 24-30”

### Noteworthy Characteristics

Not only are black raspberries delicious, but their glaucous purple canes are beautiful in the winter. Harvest when the berries are dark purple and slip off easily. A mix of early and late varieties will extend your harvest in the summer. Our favorites are ‘Jewel’ and ‘MacBlack.’

## **10. Thornless blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*)**

### Culture

Full sun

Plant in well-drained soil with high organic matter

Need to be trellised

Plant 3-4’ apart

Cut back floricanes after harvest or in the fall

Tip back primocanes to 48-60”

### Noteworthy Characteristics

Varieties of thornless blackberries produce an abundant crop without the troublesome prickles. If properly trellised, they are easy to care for and will have showy flowers in the spring followed by juicy berries. As with other small fruits, planting multiple varieties can extend your harvest window. Our favorites are ‘Chester’ and ‘Natchez.’

## **11. Turkish Rocket (*Bunias orientalis*)**

### Culture

Full sun to part shade

Drought resistant

Tolerant of most soil conditions



Easy to propagate from root fragments and seed  
Cut flower stalks back after bloom to prevent spread by seed  
Deer and rabbit resistant

Noteworthy Characteristics

Turkish rocket is a very hardy perennial in the same family as cabbage and kale. It lives most of its life as a 12” tall rosette of tender edible leaves and has a beautiful 3-4’ tall flower stalk in early spring. The developing flower shoots can be eaten like asparagus or a less-bitter broccoli raab.

**12. Rhubarb** (*Rheum rhabarbarum*)

Culture

Full sun  
Rich soil  
3-4’ spacing  
Do not harvest first year  
Deer and rabbit resistant

Noteworthy Characteristics

A large stout plant with broad leaves and red stems, rhubarb looks great in the garden and is reliably perennial. Harvest the stems in early spring to use in desserts. Do not eat the leaves, which contain high amounts of oxalic acid.

**13. Asparagus** (*Asparagus officinalis*)

Culture

Full sun  
Well-drained site rich in organic matter  
To establish, dig a furrow 12” deep, lay crowns 12-14” apart and cover  
Keep beds moist  
Do not harvest for 3 years after planting  
Will yield for 15-20 years

Noteworthy Characteristics

In the early spring, the new shoots that emerge from the ground are the asparagus we know and eat. If left to grow, these spears will quickly fern out into large wispy fronds. Plants can be harvested for a 3-4 week period and then should be left to fern out. Mature asparagus has a very attractive texture and looks great as a hedge. The fronds will naturally yellow and die back in the fall.

**14. Bloody Dock** (*Rumex sanguineus*)

Culture

Full to part sun  
Average well-drained soil  
Remove flower stalks in summer to prevent self-seeding and promote fuller plants



#### Noteworthy Characteristics

Also known as red-veined dock or red sorrel and is very ornamental. Can be grown mixed into perennial plantings. It requires minimal maintenance. It is in the same genus as common garden sorrel, and young leaves can be prepared similarly. It has a tart and spinach-like flavor that can be eaten cooked or raw.

#### **15. Cardoon** (*Cynara cardunculus*)

##### Culture

Full sun

Average soil, drought tolerant

Hardy zones 7-9

##### Noteworthy Characteristics

Closely related to artichoke, but larger and more silver in appearance. Cardoon is mostly grown as an ornamental in the US, but the leaf stalks are eaten in the Mediterranean, where it is native to. To harvest, the leaves need to be blanched by wrapping with burlap or cardboard for 4-6 weeks, then can be cut to the ground. The leaves are not edible. The showy flowers look like artichokes, but they are not as tasty.

#### **16. Sea Kale** (*Crambe maritima*)

##### Culture

Full sun to part shade

Prefers sandy, well-drained soil, drought tolerant

Prefers neutral to alkaline soil. Use lime to raise pH if necessary

Cut back flower stalks to maintain a bushy habit if desired

Easily propagated by root cuttings and seed

##### Noteworthy Characteristics

Sea kale has very attractive glaucous-blue leaves and white flowers that make it a great plant in a mixed border or in a vegetable garden. It is a popular vegetable in western Europe, where the young leaves and flower shoots are eaten. It can suffer later in the summer from common brassica pests such as harlequin bug and cabbage moths.

#### **17. Horseradish** (*Armoracia rusticana*)

##### Culture

Full to part sun

Average loamy soil

No maintenance required

Sprouts readily from root fragments. Difficult to completely remove from an area once established.



#### Noteworthy Characteristics

Horseradish is grown for its root, but the bold leaves can contrast nicely with fine foliage such as asparagus. A clump will slowly grow in size over time, especially if not harvested regularly. It is virtually impossible to remove once established, so plant it somewhere you want it to stay. It has no significant pest problems or maintenance requirements- just set it and forget it.

### **18. Garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*)**

#### Culture

Full sun to part shade

Dry to medium soil. Will start to yellow during drought.

Resistant to herbivores, but harbors allium leafminer. Do not plant near onions and garlic

Cut back flower stalks after bloom to prevent spread by seed

#### Noteworthy Characteristics

A clumping scallion alternative that looks great incorporated into a perennial bed or used as an edging plant around vegetable beds. It is one of the earliest greens you can harvest from the vegetable garden, and the late summer flowers are great for cut flowers or as an edible garnish. They are also magnets for pollinators. Native to Southeast Asia, the leaves are a common ingredient in Thai and Vietnamese dishes. It can become a pernicious weed in the garden if allowed to set seed.

### **19. Perpetual Spinach (*Beta vulgaris*)**

#### Culture

Full to part sun

Average soil

Grown as Swiss Chard, but tolerance to moderate frost keeps it productive into early winter

#### Noteworthy Characteristics

Perpetual spinach is an experiment for our garden in 2021. Tolerant of moderate frosts, we are unsure if it will overwinter in our Zone 6b garden. It is essentially a more, cold tolerant swiss chard and is harvested and prepared in much the same way.

### **20. Quamash (*Camassia quamash*)**

#### Culture

Full sun

Average soil

Late spring flowering bulb

#### Noteworthy Characteristics

Quamash is a native perennial bulb with blue flowers commonly used in spring flower displays. The bulb was traditionally eaten by Native Americans as starchy potato-like vegetable. Once planted, it



will bloom year after year. The only maintenance necessary is to cut back the foliage once it yellows in the summer.

**21. Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)**

Culture

Full sun to part shade

Average soil

Drought tolerant

Spreads aggressively by rhizomes and is difficult to remove

Noteworthy Characteristics

Also called “sunchokes,” Jerusalem artichoke is a native perennial sunflower. It grows very tall and may flop later in the season. The seeds are loved by goldfinches in the late summer. After cutting back the plants in the fall, the tubers can be dug and keep for a long time in refrigeration. They are delicious roasted, with a pleasant nutty flavor. This plant should be sited where it can be allowed to spread, or kept in a large container that can be emptied out and replanted at the end of each season.

**22. Japanese Ginger (*Zingiber mioga*)**

Culture

Part to full shade

Rich, medium-moisture soil

Noteworthy Characteristics

Myoga, or Japanese ginger, is a great addition to the woodland garden. It has tropical-looking foliage, but is entirely hardy. Small flower buds form at the base of the plant that have a mild ginger flavor and are popular in Japanese cuisine. Variegated cultivars such as ‘Dancing Crane’ offer greater ornamental value. The clumps grow slowly over the years due to spreading rhizomes.





**Plant Sources:**

1. [Nourse Farms](#): Berries, rhubarb, asparagus, and horseradish
2. [Stark Bros](#): Fruit trees and shrubs
3. [One Green World](#): Mail-order fruits, including honeyberries
4. [Cultivariable](#): Tubers and herbaceous perennials
5. [Experimental Farm Network](#): Herbaceous perennial seeds
6. [Fedco Seeds](#): Herbaceous perennial seeds

**Additional Resources**

1. *Perennial Vegetables: From Artichoke to Zuiki Taro, a Gardener's Guide to Over 100 Delicious, Easy-to-grow Edibles* by Eric Toensmeier
2. *Around The World in 80 Plants: An Edible Perennial Vegetable Adventure for Temperate Climates* by Stephen Barstow
3. [Philadelphia Orchard Project](#)
4. [Experimental Farm Network](#)
5. [Penn State Extension](#)
6. [Missouri Botanic Garden Plant Finder](#)

