



plant. pick. party.

A GIFTED GARDENER
HAS THE *perfect recipe* FOR A RELAXED ALFRESCO MEAL:
SHE LETS THE *vegetable patch* DO ALL THE WORK.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DITTE ISAGER
TEXT BY DOUGLAS BRENNER



You have to laugh when Grace Kennedy says, “I’m lazy,” especially when she’s hosting a dinner for eight in the vegetable patch where she has planted, raised, and harvested most of the ingredients on the menu. Before guests reach the buffet—a rustic table that’s a permanent fixture at one end of the garden—they will stroll past tomato vines trained up tall bamboo tepees; white-ribbed Swiss chard and red Russian kale; chartreuse eggplants and lilac bell peppers; rambling cucumber vines and lanky “walking” onions; dainty muskmelons and flamboyant cardoons.

The woman behind these 3,000 square feet of abundance, a professional garden designer and landscape painter, seems about as lazy as the honeybees bustling in and out of the hives she keeps near a row of peach trees. But Kennedy insists, “I cannot stand weeding. I overplant. I pack things in as tightly as I can.” What Kennedy likes: Growing plants that self-seed (“I’ll do anything to avoid the work part,” she says) and sharing fresh produce with friends.

To anyone who hopes to tend vigorous crops while still having time to relax and enjoy the bounty with others, the pragmatic hedonism Kennedy practices in the garden of her home in New York’s countryside, near West Point, simply makes good sense. She adheres to lessons she learned growing up in a Philadelphia suburb. “My dad’s vegetable garden looked like a Persian carpet; it was perfect,” she says. Experience has confirmed the wisdom of his precise rectangular layout: “You need to break up vegetable beds into an orderly geometric pattern. Otherwise you’ll go crazy planning annual crop rotation for healthy growth and soil.” Paths must be wide enough for a wheelbarrow but close enough together so that the gardener can reach every plant without tramping on cultivated earth.

In hopes of choking weeds out, Kennedy spaces seedlings tightly and blankets the compost-enriched soil between them with sheets of wet newspaper topped with several inches of salt hay. This year-round mulch also conserves the water she carefully directs downward with a hose nozzle. “I try not to wet the leaves—which encourages fungus—so I don’t use a sprinkler,” she says.

Besides inheriting horticultural know-how and heirloom vegetables (Kennedy still grows pole beans bred from seeds her father gave her), she learned something else:

HARVEST TABLE Opposite: A centerpiece combines just-picked flowers and produce. Eggplant, tomatoes, and watermelon are on the table, zinnias and scabiosa in a vase. Right: Kennedy at the fence of the vegetable patch.

“I noticed that nobody expects you to make dinner if you’re growing the ingredients,” she says. “A good deal!” Not that this stops her from tossing the pick of the day into a salad, ratatouille, or pasta for a quick meal with her husband, Tim D’Acquisto, an artist and builder.

Late in the season, she prepares for winter by freezing butternut squash soup and canning peppers, whole and puréed tomatoes, pickled watermelon rind, and peach jam—unless, as happened last year, every ripe peach gets eaten right away. A six-foot-tall fence ringed by a rubble-filled trench ensures that deer and other marauders don’t have first dibs on the produce. Bees, of course, are welcome to sup wherever they choose. Kennedy tempts them with vegetation whose flowers they adore: borage, thyme, basil, squash, and mustard greens.

She lures humans to her alfresco table with more than edibles. Roses, scented geraniums, and nicotiana perfume the air; cool white cosmos and blue verbena temper the heat. On evenings when Kennedy and D’Acquisto are alone, she says, “I try to get Tim out here for a drink while I’m working.” The perfect end to a lazy day.



the menu

Goat Cheese With Arugula and Nasturtium Blossoms
Pasta With Summer Squashes, Herbs, and Honey
Grilled Mustard-Garlic Chicken With Sausage
Grilled Onions, Shallots, and Leeks
Chilled Poached Apricots With Whipped Cream





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HIGH DENSITY Opposite: Tight planting and thorough mulching minimize the need for weeding and watering. Staking ups the productivity of pole beans and tomatoes, while raised beds improve drainage. Semishaded areas hold salad greens, which can grow better in full sun. Fruit trees, sunflowers, salvia, and morning glories hug the fence.

CREAM OF THE CROP Top left: Guests spread peppery arugula- and nasturtium-flecked goat cheese onto crackers.

ENDLESS SUMMER Top right: Kennedy cans whole peppers and tomatoes in olive oil. Small tomatoes, such as 'Carmello,' fit into jars easily.

A LA CART Above left: With its daytime shift over, a garden cart is free to haul tabletop accoutrements.

MENU PLAN Above right: In fall or winter, Kennedy maps out her beds to plan her spring planting. Then she takes stock of seeds saved from last season's crop and orders new varieties.



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ONIONS DU JOUR Kennedy devotes ample space in the garden to tasty bulbs in the allium family, such as 'Ailsa Craig,' 'Stuttgart,' and cipollini onions and 'Prizetaker' leeks. Opposite: A rich assortment of the pickings is served with grilled sausage and chicken. Freshly snipped chive flowers are just the right garnish.

RIPE AND SWEET Above: Muscat syrup and whipped cream with cardamom enhance poached apricots.

Produced by Matthew Axe, Anna Kovel, Christina Lane, and Lindsey Taylor

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