

Food Forest Garden

A food forest is basically an orchard integrated with understory plantings. In this design, layers of plants that create mutually beneficial relationships, produce food, yield more quantity and variety per square foot of space by maximizing the use of three dimensional space. These layers are inspired by the natural forest and outlined below. Please note one does not have to include all seven layers. We recommend incorporating at least three layers (canopy or low-tree, shrub or herb and ground cover).

1. Canopy Layer - any original mature fruit trees or tall growing fruit or nut trees. Larger trees can help shelter young trees and shrubs
Examples: Chestnut, Apples, pears and cherries on semi-dwarf roots stock (MM106, OHxF, Colt, Mahaleb), Mulberry, Persimmon, Pinion Pine Acacia (fixes nitrogen)
2. Low tree Layer-smaller nut and fruit trees on dwarfing root stocks.
Examples: Filberts, Apples (M27, M26 root) Cherry (Gisela root) Figs, Apricots, Peaches, Nectarines & Plums (St. Julian root), Pears (OHxF or Quince root), Medlar, Paw Paw, Bamboo Bay Laurel and Cornelian cherry.
3. Shrub Layer-fruiting bushes
Examples: Currants, Blueberries, Gooseberries, Aronia, Blackberry, Goumi, Elderberry, Seaberry, Roses, Serviceberry, Witch hazel, High bush Cranberry
4. Herbaceous layer- Perennials, herbs and vegetables
Examples: Echinacea, Bee Balm, Marshmallow, Comfrey, Rosemary, Lavender (south exposure), Fennel, Artichoke, Tomatoes (when trees are still young), Kale.
5. Ground Cover Layer- edible plants that spread horizontally. Creates a living mulch that helps conserve water.
Examples: Kinnikinnick, creeping thyme, Chamomile, Oregano, Mint, Strawberry, Sweet Violet, Wild Ginger, Rubus calycinoïdes, Yerba Buena, Cranberries.
6. Rhizosphere (root) Layer- plants grown for the roots and tubers. These can help pull up nutrients from deep in the soil.
Examples: Jerusalem Artichoke, Camas, Garlic, parsnips, Carrots, Beets, Potato, Licorice, Astragalus.
7. Vertical Layer- Vines and climbers
Examples: Grapes, Kiwi, Akebia, Cucumber, Hops, Melon, Peas, Beans, Squash, Jasmine.

Resources:

“**Gia’s Garden**” written by Toby Hemenway

“**Introduction to Permaculture**” by Bill Mollison

“**The Backyard Orchardist**” and “**The Backyard Berry Book**” by Stella Otto

“**The Permaculture Activist**” quarterly magazine

“Obviously, few of us are in a position to restore the forests. But tens of millions of us have gardens, or access to open spaces such as industrial wastelands, where trees can be planted, and if full advantage can be taken of the potentialities that are available, even in heavily built-up areas, new ‘city forests’ can arise...”

-Robert A. de J. Hart

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