



## Up on the Roof

A garden designer packs edibles and ornamentals into a poolside roof garden

by Tracey Williams

**Waterfront Park Place is an 18-floor** condominium building in Louisville, Ky., overlooking the Ohio River. Several years ago I was challenged to create a garden for its sixth-floor outdoor pool deck. All residents would share the garden, which needed dining nooks and lounging areas, and it would be highly visible from the 12 floors above. The predominantly southwestern exposure offered gorgeous views but also fierce and unrelenting sunlight. Two small utility buildings created some

difficult angles and cried out for a vegetative covering to soften their stark concrete-block walls.

The first thing a visitor sees is the wall of one of these utility buildings. I used four rows of wall-mounted planters to offer a greeting from a wide array of edibles and ornamentals. These narrow planters, filled with a green-roof growing medium and outfitted with drip irrigation lines, provide sharp drainage. The building's residents are welcome to snip and enjoy the shallow-rooted fruits, herbs and

vegetables that are also mixed into the wall planters each year.

A narrow walkway leads past the shed to the lounging and dining area; this I edged with a switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal'). In the space's dining area, native and well-adapted plants explode from massive interlocking planters that separate this deck from an adjoining private condominium and balcony. Yew (*Taxus hicksii*) forms a tall evergreen backdrop for the mix of perennials, herbs, vegetables and flowers.



Far left: Native shrubs fill movable planters by the pool. Left: Hicks's yew backs a mix of tender and hardy perennials in one sitting area. Below: The walls of a utility shed serve as growing space for edible and ornamental plants.

Planters around the pool frame views of the city and river. Large square pots house native service-berry shrubs (*Amelanchier arborea*), which offer early spring blooms and autumn fruit and colored foliage. Six large rectangular planters sit on wheels, making it easy to arrange and rearrange areas for the residents to sit and sun. Large, low-maintenance, colorful *Itea* 'Henry's Garnet' and feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster') fill these planters, with space leftover for annuals.

In this urban, exposed environment, one can't help but marvel at the resiliency of plants to survive. But one notices most of all the ability of a spot of green to attract visitors, human and otherwise. Mockingbirds venture above the six stories to steal a berry. The drip irrigation draws thirsty birds while delivering the moisture the plants need to bear the heat—just enough, no more. The scent of recently harvested herbs permeates the air; the grass plumes gracefully obscure the parking lot nearby. One can easily forget this is a garden up high. ☞



### The Edible Roof

The rooftop containers at Waterfront Park Place aren't merely ornamental—they also offer fresh eating to building residents, plus birds and beneficial insects.

Shallow, narrow wall planters include strawberries, culinary sage, rosemary, salad burnet, thyme, parsley and many other herbs, plus a wide variety of lettuces and other seasonal greens. These plants' shallow roots and appreciation for sharp drainage make them good candidates for green-wall systems.

In larger containers, catmints, coneflowers and salvias serve up a feast to pollinating insects. Edibles cleverly disguise themselves as ornamentals in these mixed plantings. Broccoli, swiss chard, lacinato kale, cilantro, parsley and Asian greens make seasonal appearances, to the delight of the condo dwellers.

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