

# Grow your own is going exotic!

Gardeners are being tempted away from growing traditional vegetables by 'exotic and unusual' produce



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News editor

THE grow your own trend is still booming. Seeds and plant sales are soaring and allotments are harder to get than ever, but now there's a new twist - exotic and unusual produce - tempting gardeners to swap their potatoes for yams, apples for lemons, onions for ginger, and parsley for celery leaf.

Exotic growing seminars are springing up all over the country, but a recent garden design at St James's Palace, London, demonstrated to the public how well growing

exotic fruit and veg could mix with simple, cheap, space-saving and accessible ideas for novices and experienced gardeners alike.

The Garden Party To Make A Difference saw the gardens of Clarence House, Lancaster House and Marlborough House transformed into a public festival of sustainability as part of the HRH Prince of Wales' 'Start' initiative.

Grow your own plays a large part in 'Start' which aims to help people across the UK take small steps towards a more sustainable lifestyle and to demonstrate what a more energy efficient, cleaner and healthier future could look like.

Among the gardens and exhibits on display, one that gained particular attention was the 'Future Cities Garden' - showcasing innovative edible gardening -

along the south facade of St James's Palace.

The garden was created by organic farmer, gardener, writer and broadcaster Tom Petherick in association with a garden and landscape design team of Lulu Urquhart and Adam Hunt.

Adam told GN their mission

for design was for it to be: "Accessible, inspirational, to encourage people to sow in small spaces and for it not to be too expensive," while Lulu explained that all-year round growing and harvesting was very important and the exotic, unusual planting was down to: "People

## Want to learn to grow exotic crops?

GARDEN Organic's 'Sowing New Seeds' project will hold its first ever Exotic Crop Fair on Sunday, October 3, at Ryton Gardens in Warwickshire.

The event includes workshops on how to grow exotic crops and save seed from them. There will be cookery demos inspired by food from the Ivory Coast and India.

For more information, call Garden Organic on 0247 6303517.



St James's Palace is transformed



becoming more adventurous - more information

means their palates are broadening - and the nurseries are responding."

Contact the team... Tom, Lulu and Adam's landscape consultancy can be contacted on 01963 351823. www.petherickurquhartandhunt.com

## Lulu Urquhart's exotic choices

### Easy to grow

#### Chilean guava (*Ugni molinae*)

Has little berries that are bright red - they look like cranberries but taste like strawberries! It's related to the myrtle. In winter it will survive with very little damage outside. If very cold, it may benefit from covering, or grow in pots and overwinter in a greenhouse. It was reputedly Queen Victoria's favourite fruit.

### Challenging

#### Japanese ginger (*Zingiber mlioga*)

It has a really beautiful flower, and attractive leaves that look like maize, but more subtle. The pale pink fragrant flowers give the plant its nickname of 'dancing crane' and are prized in Japan where they are eaten. But more commonly, the stems are finely sliced and eaten with sashimi and miso soup. It's not reliably hardy in the UK.



TOM and Lulu discuss the 'Future Cities Garden' with the Duchess of Cornwall. According to Lulu, the Duchess was particularly interested in lemongrass which was growing in troughs.

## Incredible edibles from their garden

LULU and Adam are urging gardeners to make their vegetable growing choices based upon taste and nutrition. Here are some of their incredible edibles from the 'Future Cities Garden'...

**1 Yakon** (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*) is an

Incan vegetable related to sunflower which has a crunchy delicious root, rather like a sweet potato.

**2 Devil's Tongue** (*Amorphophallus konjac*) is used like a potato and is a great aid to digestion and can help with weight loss.

**3 Japanese asparagus** (*Aralia cordata*) is a great perennial vegetable that can be used raw in salads or cooked and added to miso soup.

**4 Chinese lantern** (*Physalis alkekengi*) is a relative of the Cape gooseberry and is prized for its bright red paper 'lanterns' and the red fruit inside.

**5 Szechuan pepper tree** (*Zanthoxylum simulans*) carries berries with a unique lemony, peppery taste and slight 'mouth-numbing' qualities.

**6 American groundnut** (*Apios americana*) is a perennial vine with delicious edible beans and tubers which have a high content of protein. This plant was once the staple food of Native Americans.

**7 Gotu kola** (*Centella asiatica*) is a small, leafy green perennial plant used as a medicinal herb for thousands of years in India, China, and Indonesia. In Sri Lankan cuisine, it is often added to rice and coconut milk or used raw in salads. In parts of Thailand, it is also drunk as an afternoon stimulant.

The Future Cities Garden used plants from...

Arne Herbs, Bristol. 01275 333 399. www.arneherbs.co.uk  
Edulis Nursery, (for rare plants) Reading. 01635 578113 info@edulis.co.uk