

Grow unique edibles to wow your guests

By Melinda Myers

Make your next gathering one to remember by including a few unique vegetables on the relish tray, as a side dish or for dessert. Your guests will be “wowed” not only because you grew your own ingredients, but because of the unique shape, color or flavor of the vegetables you serve.

Create a memorable dining experience with attractive edible containers adorning the patio, balcony or deck. Include a few Candle Fire Okra plants in large containers to create a tropical feel. The dark green leaves, hibiscus flowers and colorful red pods make a striking display in a container or the garden.

Surprise guests with roasted Candle Fire okra and Candyland Red currant tomatoes. Roasting okra eliminates the slime that prevents many from eating this unique vegetable. And don't discard any overripe pods, use them in flower arrangements to dress up any event.



The uniquely shaped

Mad Hatter sweet red pepper has a refreshing citrusy floral flavor. Photo/All-America Selections

Allow your guests to harvest their own greens, herbs and cherry tomatoes to toss into their salads or season their meal. Use Prizm kale as a vertical dark green accent in your containers. Then add a contrasting ornamental leaf lettuce like Red Sails, long lasting vibrant Red Kingdom Mizuna (Japanese mustard) and edible flowers like calendulas, nasturtiums and pansies. The new Patio Choice tomatoes produce up to 100 yellow cherry tomatoes on an 18-inch plant. Plant it in a container for a splendid display then watch as guests harvest fresh tomatoes from your centerpiece.

Dress up the table, indoors or out, by using a few potted herbs as centerpieces. Include Dark Opal Basil with dark purple leaves and compact Dolce Fresca in a simple container or more decorative pot to create a splendid display. Just place a pair of garden snips on the table and let your guests flavor their meals.

Make any meal special with a Bok Choy Frittata. Your guests will be impressed when you create this popular dish from your own homegrown ingredients. Asian Delight Pak Choi (or Bok Choy) is slow to flower so you will enjoy season-long harvests. The mild flavored tender white stems and textured dark green leaves look good in containers, the garden and when served fresh in a salad, frittata or stir fry.

Serve a colorful platter of sliced tomatoes with the Chef's Choice series of red, pink, orange, yellow and green fruit. The globe shaped beefsteak tomatoes have the perfect balance of acid to sugar. Their disease resistance, productivity, yield, flavor, color and performance made them winners in the

nonprofit All-America Selections national trials.

Stuff a few of the uniquely shaped Mad Hatter sweet peppers with cheese. Your guests will enjoy the beauty and refreshing citrusy floral flavor of this three-sided red pepper. The vigorous plant produces an abundance of fruit, so you'll have plenty to use fresh in appetizers and salads throughout the growing season or pickled for future enjoyment.

End the evening with a surprise. Serve each guest their own watermelon for dessert. Mini Love watermelon packs lots of sweet flavor into individual size fruit. Or brighten their dessert plates with a slice or two of Gold in Gold. This eye-catching watermelon has a yellow rind with golden stripes. The orange-gold flesh is crisp and sugary.

With just a little planning, you can plant unique and beautiful edibles in your garden and containers this season. Then find fun ways to include these in dishes shared at potlucks, meals for family and friends, or as a snack to enjoy on a summer afternoon.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening." She hosts the Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" gardening DVD series and the nationally syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" TV and radio segments.