



While those values remain, the way we live is changing.” I can’t disagree. Yoga classes, cocktails, odd little ferns among the hostas—it appears that there really is a New South.

The Edible Garden

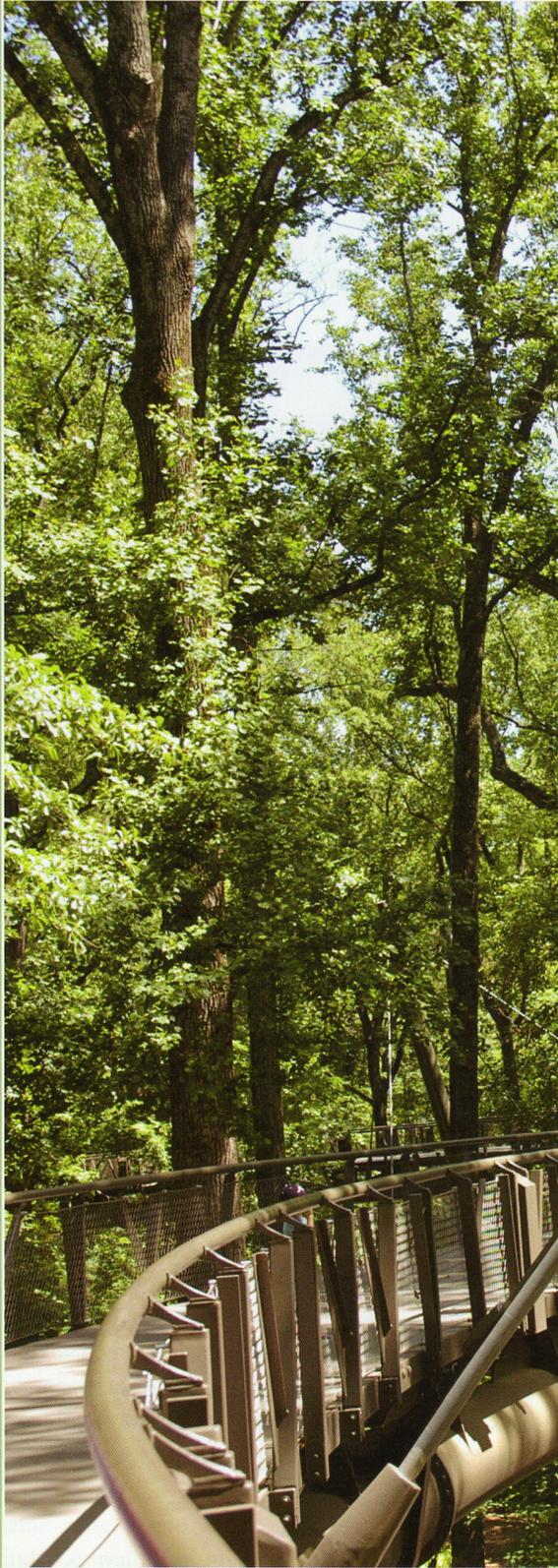
If a New South indeed exists, my parents were definitely part of the Old South, and I, (born in 1963), fall into a strange in-between period. My parents grew up on the farm, weeding and plowing, skittering across a hot tin roof in bare feet to turn the drying tomatoes, putting up vegetables for winter in a sweltering kitchen. Not surprisingly, once grown, both vowed never to farm again so that knowledge was lost to me. I never planted or weeded a thing as a child.

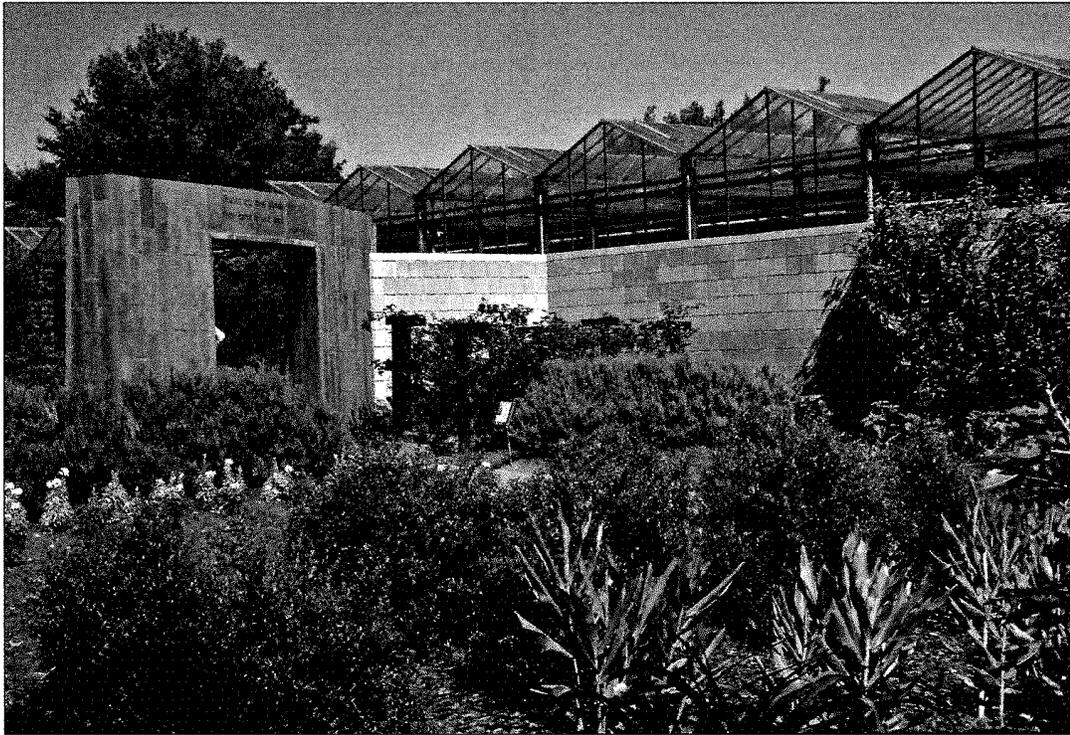
My parents grew up eating what they’d grown. I grew up eating a mix of the old and the worst of the new: TV dinners and fried chicken, commercially canned green beans or fresh ones

ABOVE: Artwork and stonework adorn various garden spaces in the ABG.

INSET: The ABG features 160 cultivars of hydrangeas.

OPPOSITE TOP: A new canopy walk in the Storza woods. **OPPOSITE INSET:** *Spigelia marilandica*.





simmered with fatback alongside a plate of vine-ripened tomatoes. I had biscuits and grits for breakfast, or Cocoa Puffs. Fruit cocktail was a treat, as were fresh Georgia peaches dripping flavor. I'd have Coca-Cola for breakfast and sweet tea for dinner. I'm surprised I'm still alive.

I clearly wasn't alone in my upbringing. Across the country many of my generation are seeking a return to their farming roots, but in a way that suits a busy, urban lifestyle, accompanied by a desire for innovative food made with fresh, local ingredients. This movement is alive in the South, and although there is still plenty of fried chicken and barbeque, a new wave of chefs is reinventing Southern cooking. The ABG is cashing in on both trends with the Edible Garden and demonstration kitchen.

The Edible Garden at the ABG is definitely of the New South. Of two proposed plans, one was a more linear, traditional garden plot. The

other had a "crop circle" motif with a vegetable amphitheater, a central water feature, and an herb wall. The less traditional arrangement won out because part of the purpose of the garden was to show that edible gardens could be productive, beautiful and inspiring.

The ABG's Edible Garden, which opened in 2010, is one acre of red Georgia clay amended with plenty of horse manure. Colleen Golden oversees the edible garden and does the bulk of the work. On the day I visited in early May, she was trading out the cabbages and peas for tomatoes, okra, corn and peanuts. Given the temperatures that Georgia had been seeing, I was surprised that she was only now putting in the warm-weather crops. But she told me, much to my surprise, that the safe date in Atlanta is April 15th, the same as Seattle's. Of course, the South doesn't dillydally in going from winter to summer temps as we do in the Pacific Northwest,

ABOVE: The ABG's 16000-square foot conservatory.

OPPOSITE: The variegated Indian holly fern (*Arachnioides simplicior* 'Variegata').



so one can actually put out warm-weather plants in mid-April and expect them to thrive.

On this warm, sunny day the remaining lettuces look limp and unhappy, and the newly planted peppers squat tiny and barely noticeable against the soil. Looking more robust are the garden's perennial and woody plants. Crabapples are espaliered along the top of one half of the "crop circle." A hedge of mixed pineapple guava (*Acca sellowiana*, syn. *Feijoa sellowiana*) and fragrant tea olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) screens a parking lot. Muscadines, a southeast native, climb walls in place of more traditional grapes due to their greater pest and disease resistance. The red flowers of dwarf pomegranates (*Punica granatum* 'Nana') provide sparks of color even in the dazzlingly bright afternoon light.

The herb wall, truly the showpiece of the garden, probably falls into the category of "You wouldn't want to try this at home." The herb wall originally contained plants with differing watering needs, but as they were all on the same zone of the irrigation system many died, and the wall had to be rethought. After two

years, Colleen has achieved a truce with the herb wall; it may not have every herb you could want but she has found an array of plants that look lush and can handle the watering regime.

One of the most innovative aspects of the garden is the inclusion of the demonstration kitchen. Several times during the week, local chefs come to the kitchen to show what can be done with food that is currently in season. Some of the recipes use traditional Southern vegetables but with a nouvelle twist: gingered okra with tomatoes, black-eyed pea and roasted beet salad, pineapple guava-mint iced tea.

The garden was pretty bare on that day in early May, but I knew it wouldn't be for long. I ask Colleen if people often pilfer the produce, but she says no; she thinks the signs saying that leftovers go to the food bank lessen thievery. She adds that if things do go missing it's usually something like a melon "that you've been watching and waiting for," when suddenly it's gone, probably tucked neatly into the basket of a stroller. A true vine-ripened melon? Coming from Seattle, it's hard to blame them.

The Edible Garden like the rest of the ABG, melds the Old South and the New—peanuts and okra next to pineapple guava and cardoon—but among all these plants, where is that most traditional, iconic Georgia plant, the peach? Consigned to a few pots, thanks to Colleen's lobbying efforts. Traditional they may be, but trying to grow a peach organically is a tough proposition, and who has the time?

I wouldn't want to grow those peaches either, but if I'm going to travel back to the South of my childhood I want my peaches—sweet, aromatic and a juicy mess. Why a Southern summer without a peach would be like a Southern summer without thunderstorms, soft, warm nights or lightning bugs—unthinkable. ∞

PAIGE EMBRY is a former geologist and garden coach/designer who currently writes the blog www.ayearinseattlegardens.com. This is Paige's first article for the "Bulletin."