



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL ELLEDGE  
BY KELLY TAGORE

# little. pavilion on the prairie

A Missouri couple gives new meaning to the phrase “eating out” by building a striking outdoor dining room—right in the middle of their vegetable garden.







For the sake of design and the health of the soil, Linda Taylor regularly rotates the garden's mix of annuals, such as marigolds and cabbages (above) and perennials, like blackberries and asparagus.



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HEN STEPHEN AND LINDA TAYLOR  
PREPARE VEGETABLES, THE JOURNEY  
FROM EARTH TO PLATE IS SHORT. THAT'S

because they've brought their table into the garden—and their kitchen and dining room too. All are neatly tucked into an 11-by-17-foot wooden pavilion perched on the edge of their vegetable garden. Most summer days the couple enjoys breakfast and dinner there, using just-picked produce and herbs.

The pavilion and the 125-acre property that surrounds it are set in the rolling terrain of Edgerton, Missouri, a rural patchwork of farmland and tall-grass prairie. It's a world away from Kansas City, 45 minutes south, where the Taylors lived until three years ago and where they still work. "I realized one day that I wanted less house and more land," says Linda, an energetic woman in her mid 50s, who is the director of a community-outreach program at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. Although she and her husband, Stephen, a lawyer also in his mid 50s, were devoted to their urban lifestyle—they're passionate collectors of regional art and have worked tirelessly to renew downtown Kansas City—they longed for the outdoors. So

the couple, who do nothing in half measures, began a four-year search, finally settling in 1997 on a corner of a 1,500-acre family farm that still grows corn, soybeans, and wheat.

In 1998, with a new house under construction, the Taylors began driving up to Edgerton on weekends to get the lay of the land, occasionally camping out overnight in a tent. When Stephen brought in a bulldozer to cut in the road leading to the house, they decided to start the garden at the same time: They cleared a spot about a quarter of a mile from the house and laid out 16 raised beds.

Getting the plots to yield the kinds of produce the couple had dreamed about took some time, however. "I wasn't a vegetable gardener," says Linda, who had tended a perennial flower garden in the city for 25 years. "The first year on the farm was pretty pathetic." Only hot-weather crops such as corn and eggplant were able to thrive in the newly placed soil. "Our neighbors would stop by and say, 'Oh dear, what are you doing?'" she recalls. It wasn't until the following season, when the earth was better conditioned, that she began





**Top** Linda chose the pavilion's site a quarter mile from the house because of its proximity to an old barn (faintly visible in the morning mist), which she uses as a potting shed. **Above** Stephen and Linda in a rare moment of repose. **Left** Sunflowers brighten many of the garden beds. **Below, left to right** The couple entertains outside regularly from April through October; Linda keeps her crops healthy with fertilizer from neighborhood cows and chickens; the garden contains 16 rectangular and L-shaped raised beds.

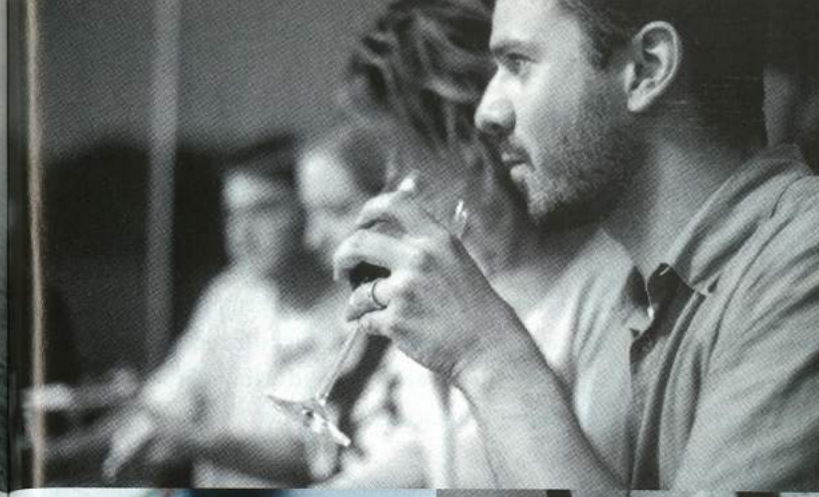


to see real results. Today, the Taylor's beds are brimming with strawberries, blueberries, broccoli rabe, and lettuces.

The idea for the pavilion was inspired by a 1992 trip to Rancho la Puerta spa in Baja California. Every morning during their stay, the couple would hike to the resort's organic garden and eat breakfast in the gardener's cottage. "We loved the experience," says Linda. "When we decided to move to the country, it was an unspoken idea that we would re-create it."

**T**he Taylors enlisted the help of El Dorado Inc., the 10-person Kansas City architectural firm that had built the fireplaces in their new house. "Our main consideration was views," says Doug Stockman, who runs the firm with four other partners. "It had to be transparent from all sides." The team chose basic materials—standard pressure-treated pine, off-the-shelf screening, corrugated copper, and Ipé, a tropical hardwood—and used traditional construction techniques that characterize the farm buildings throughout the area. Capped with an angled roof that follows the slope of the garden, the graceful, clean-lined building appears to hover over the landscape.

The pavilion's amenities are as uncomplicated as its design. Although the structure has electricity—there's a ceiling fan, lights, and power outlets—Linda and Stephen rely on just a



**Clockwise from top left** After helping harvest the ingredients for dinner, guests sit down to eat; though the pavilion has electricity, the Taylors cook on nothing more elaborate than a charcoal grill and a butane burner; the trappings of a meal; the pavilion's dining table, counters, and deck are made of Ipé, a tropical hardwood that stands up to the elements without being stained or finished; fresh berries and cherry tomatoes get a quick rinse under water from an outdoor pump.



"The garden is big, but not so big that we're inundated," says Linda. "We've put in **medium quantities of a lot of things** rather than large quantities of a few things."





charcoal grill and a butane burner for making dinner. "It's simple," says Linda, "but it's enough to cook anything." Meal prep starts up at the house: Linda or Stephen will marinate a cut of meat or fish in a plastic Baggie with olive oil, herbs, and salt and pepper. "Then we'll grab the wine and some ice, and head down," says Linda. While Stephen gets the grill going, Linda and their guests, who can number eight in good weather, will wander among the beds and pick the rest of the ingredients for the meal. The vegetables, which they also marinate in Baggies with oil and

herbs, go on the grill in baskets or into a sauté pan. Although Linda often serves stylish dishes such as tuna grilled with fava beans, noodles, and black sesame seeds, "it's hard to beat a hamburger and sweet corn," says Stephen.

While the gardening keeps them busy, the couple relishes relaxing in the pavilion and savoring the fruits—and vegetables—of their labor. On summer evenings when the sunlight has turned golden and friends and neighbors are gathered around their table, Stephen says, "it's hard to find a nicer spot." ✨

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