In light of Americans’ increasing awareness of environmental issues, many have started to take a critical look at the way in which natural resources are used. One staple of American life which has recently come under attack is the front lawn. In *Edible Estates*, architect and designer Fritz Haeg proclaims the front lawn to be a harmful element of the American landscape. In his view, lawns are unproductive consumers of water and other resources, requiring harmful practices such as the spreading of chemical fertilizers and the use of fuel-powered lawnmowers and weed-eaters. As an alternative, Haeg suggests ripping out lawns and planting productive vegetable gardens in their place.

While the text highlights three American families that traded in their traditional front yards for “edible estates,” this book is not a “how-to” guide, nor does it claim to be. (Haeg refers readers to Rosalind Creasy’s *The Complete Book of Edible Landscaping* for practical tips of installing a front-yard garden.) The objective of this book is to compile insights, offered by a variety of authors, about the typical front lawn, what it represents, and why its function should change. For planners interested in environmental and food security concerns, this book is a useful read. By presenting the theory that lawns are detrimental, *Edible Estates* helps planners to analyze practices of American life that may be harmful, even if they are widely accepted.

Haeg’s suggestion – that Americans should exchange their front lawns for their backyards by turning them into high-yielding vegetable gardens – is a somewhat radical idea that opposes conventional thinking about the use of residential outdoor space. In the author’s opinion, replacing ornamental lawns with gardens would be a more productive, beautiful, and creative use. Moreover, the front-yard gardens cultivate not only food for families, but also social interaction and community among neighbors. All of the homeowners involved in edible
front lawn projects stated that their favorite outcome was the increased sense of community they felt with their neighbors and friends.

While Haeg claims that edible estates present a “practical food-producing initiative,” these projects may not be feasible for all families. For a dedicated household that has the time and energy to tend to a garden on a daily basis, an edible estate is a great project. But for many families, the monetary resources that these projects require could be overwhelming, with high start-up costs associated with renting equipment (such as sod-cutters and rototillers), installing irrigation systems, and purchasing mulch and compost. Therefore, edible estates may not be ideal for low- or moderate-income families. Also, many people lack sufficient knowledge, time, experience, or gumption to feel comfortable with gardening in plain view of inquisitive neighbors. And some neighborhoods’ restrictive covenants dictate specific instructions for lawn maintenance and do not allow front-yard gardens, thereby preventing edible estates from becoming more widely prescribed.

Despite these challenges, planners interested in food security and resource conservation could adapt Haeg’s ideas into smaller, more feasible projects in their municipalities. For example, if residents are interested in growing their own vegetables and connecting with their neighbors, but cannot implement front-yard gardens due to their neighborhood covenants or because they live in rental housing, a community garden might be a good alternative. If homeowners are concerned about the negative environmental effects of their lawns, contributor Diana Balmori suggests planting mixed grasses and flowers that resemble a prairie landscape. If residents are able to withstand their neighbors’ possible skepticism about attracting animals or appearing untidy, this might be a less expensive, easier-to-maintain lawn alternative.

Haeg’s writing often seems confrontational and extreme, with snippets such as “an attack on the front lawn” and “our dream is to be arrested for planting vegetables in a front lawn where it is illegal.” Such abrasive language is not necessary to effectively convey his message, and these statements could easily deter a novice gardener from pursuing his ideas. Additionally, such language may dissuade planning professionals who are interested in implementing Haeg’s suggestions in their communities.

Overall, Edible Estates is a quick yet thought-provoking text for planners who want to absorb the salient details about the project. While the book is not a must-read for every planner, it does present ideas that could help professionals to creatively rethink their communities’ open spaces. Transportation planners, for instance, might encourage neighborhood associations to convert traffic medians into gardens, and community development planners could promote front yard gardens as a tool for increasing social interaction in neighborhoods. By taking Edible Estates a step further and creating ordinances that allow for the alterative use of lawns and other open areas, planners can play a large role in cultivating a more efficient and creative use of space.