Blue corn, Chinese artichokes, soybeans and chicory are just a few of the crops you might find growing in the beds of the Bruno Vegetable Garden. The purpose of this area is to educate and to demonstrate by showing examples of plant materials that can be grown in the Birmingham area. In addition to the usual vegetables you might find in a home garden, you will also see uncommon or exotic ones as well as agriculture crops such as tobacco and cotton. A miniature orchard has been added at one end with cordonned apple trees (branches trained to a support) forming a low fence around the plot that contains dwarf apple varieties.

 Beds devoted to fruits and vegetables are the centerpiece of a roomlike area designed by Mary Carolyn G. Boothby, Jody H. Hamre and Carolyn D. Tynes, landscape designers in Garden Designs. Arbors and fences line three sides of the garden to give it a sense of enclosure and to hide the surrounding areas. With garden furniture and built-in seating, the arbors welcome you to sit and enjoy the area. In early spring sunlight warms the bare wood of the arbors and they become comfortable “sun pockets.” In summer, green canopies of vines turn them into a series of shady retreats. Different vines, such as gourds, aerial potatoes, kiwies, muscadines and grapes are trained to the arbors every year to show a range of varieties that may be grown here. Vegetables in hanging baskets, such as tomatoes and cucumbers, are displayed under the arbors. Evergreen strawberries form a beautiful ground cover.

If you enter the Bruno Vegetable Garden from the Formal Garden, you will pass by the Enthusiast Gardens. These two small areas are designed to demonstrate the gardening potential of lots the size of the typical Birmingham back yard. You may also enter the vegetable garden from the Camellia Garden by way of the Herb Terrace.

Also the work of Garden Designs, the Herb Terrace was redesigned at the same time as the vegetable renovation and offers a vantage point for viewing the vegetable garden. From here you can see more clearly the patterns made by rows of vegetables in each bed. The colors and textures of foliage and fruit create a pleasing patchwork, proving that vegetable gardens can be beautiful as well as functional. The herbs were moved from one of the raised beds to the terrace on the north side of the Garden. The hillside, a badly eroded bank of clay that would only grow a few vines, is now an attractive format for the growing of herbs.

Herbs, many of which are native to the areas of the Mediterranean, need special attention paid to the soil in which they grow. The soil composition must be such that it retains moisture while at the same time it drains well. The Terrace also provides the very sunny and protected environment necessary for good growth. There are many types of herbs - medicinal, culinary, aromatic, and cosmetic and these are represented on the Terrace. Under the direction of the Herb Army (The Birmingham Herb Society) our herbs are thriving in a pleasing profusion of color and aroma that would enhance any garden.

The Bruno Vegetable Garden is designed to educate on several levels. City children, for example, can see how crops such as watermelons and cotton grow. Instead of being harvested, fruits and vegetables are left in place so that visitors can observe the entire life cycle of the plant.

At another level, home gardeners can learn about unusual vegetables, new varieties, or new planting techniques to try in their own gardens. For example small blocks of vegetables can actually use space more productively than do traditional single rows. When plants are set in staggered rows within the block, ground that would normally be wasted on pathways will yield food for the table instead. Tall plants are arranged in rows that run north to south to provide the best exposure to the sun.

Raised brick beds offer several advantages, including improved drainage and deeper soil. Since you can sit on the edge to plant and weed, working the beds is easier on your back and knees. These 20 by 30 foot plots are a part of the original vegetable garden and are the size to meet Auburn University Extension Center’s recommendations for feeding a family of four.

Thus with its exotic and common vegetables and with its educational designs, the Bruno Vegetable Garden appeals to all ages and invites guests to linger, to learn and to enjoy.
The Bruno Vegetable Garden
Given by Bruno’s Incorporated
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The Bruno Vegetable Garden

Designed by Pat Hinton
Written by Vicki Ingham

The Birmingham Botanical Gardens
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