

Cabo San Lucas 3-day Weekend • Wine and Cheese Party

The Magazine of Western Living

Sunset

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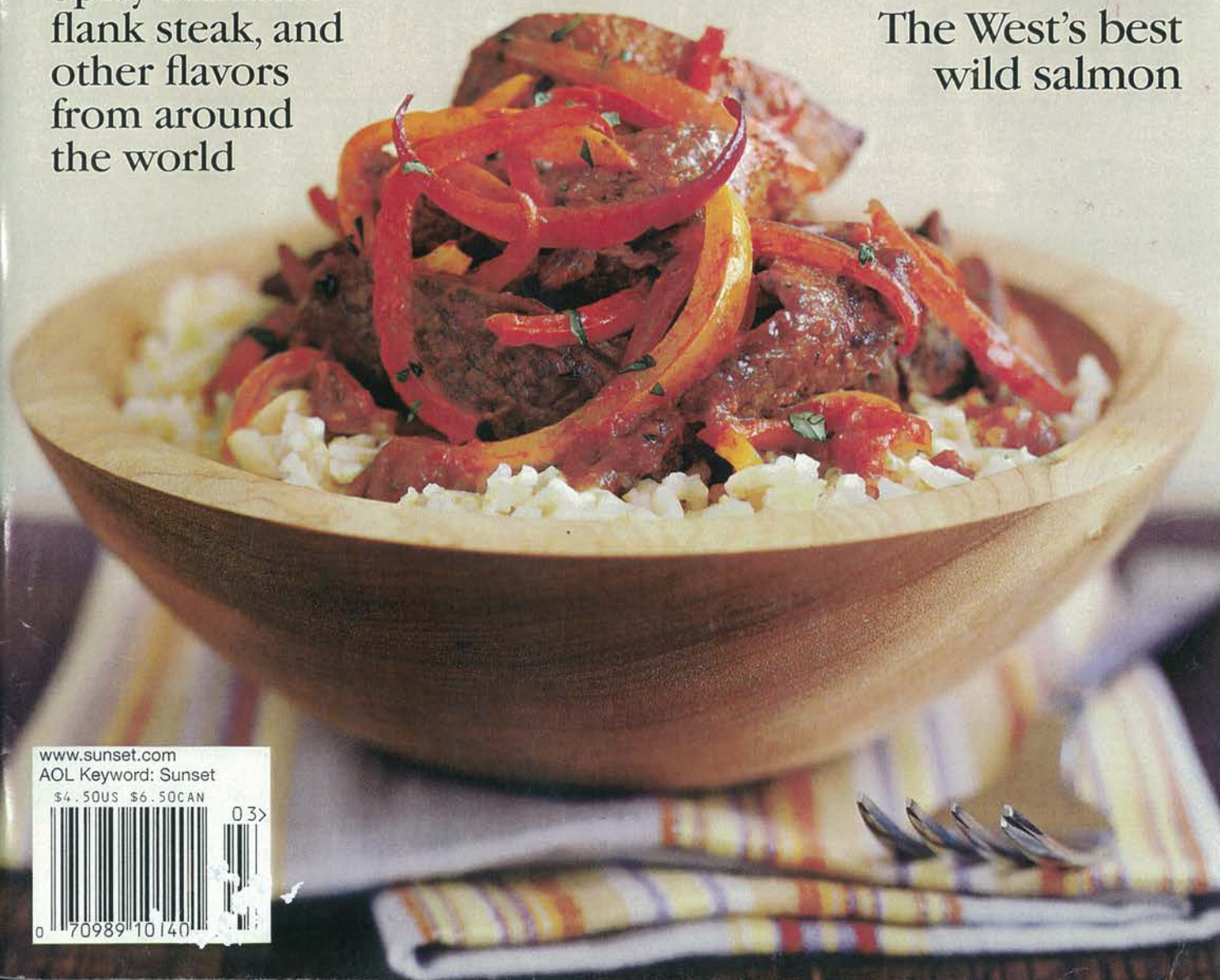
Rice Bowls

Spicy Mexican flank steak, and other flavors from around the world

15-PAGE SPECIAL SECTION
Great ideas for garden living

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Sunset Living Well IN THE GARDEN

Home landscapes these days are more than places to grow plants. They are sanctuaries from the outside world where we find physical and spiritual well-being. This special section is filled with ideas to help you enjoy outdoor living.

Growing supper

Raising produce is a pleasure in this Southern California potager

By Sharon Cohoon • Photographs by Steven Gunther

If you want to get the most out of your garden with a soupçon of style, consider copying the French. That's what Linda and Steven Brombal did at their home in Newport Beach, California, and the whole family is delighted with the results. Their kitchen garden, inspired by the classic French *potager*, feeds the family and provides an outdoor room that looks *très joli*.

The Brombals chose this type of garden because they wanted to experiment with growing vegetables and herbs at their Provençal-style tract home. Since this space would also be their primary outdoor-living area, they planned out a yard that would be attractive and easy to maintain.

As in a classic potager, the Brombals' crops grow in small rectangular, square, and circular beds separated by walkways. The little plots and generous paths make weeding, watering, harvesting, and other chores accessible. And the geometric patterns add order to the garden.

Early in the season, when crops are young and a lot of bare earth is still visible, the layout and brickwork become the focal points of the garden. When the growing season is going strong and plants are lush and full, the potager's arrangement keeps the herbs' and



Dining and gardening go hand in hand in this small, elegant potager, where herbs and vegetables grow near the table.



The side yard repeats the kitchen-garden theme. Pots filled with herbs sit on bricks between Mediterranean shrubs. Linda Brombal picks flowers with dog Sophia (at right).

vegetables' growth in check, with charming spillover onto the pathways. "Either way," Linda says, "it's pretty."

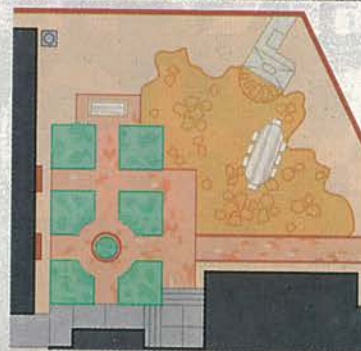
Crops for freshness and flavor

In their garden, the Brombals have had great luck with different kinds of lettuce, turning 11-year-old daughter Sydney, who didn't eat salads before, into a greens lover. Linda didn't alter her salad-dressing recipe—it's still olive oil, champagne vinegar, and freshly grated Parmesan. "But now the chives or scallions I add are right out of the garden," she says of the dressing she pours over just-picked lettuce. "And fresh greens taste absolutely amazing," she says, adding that now "Sydney

requests salads and loves to harvest the lettuce."

The Brombals have also grown artichokes, arugula, chard, and lots of herbs, including basil, chives, and lemon verbena. There are also some permanent plants in the beds—mostly aromatics like lavender and salvia. Linda has always used herbs in her cooking, but now that they're growing right outside her kitchen door, she uses them more spontaneously. "If I want to add rosemary to roast potatoes, sage to roast chicken, or arugula to the salad, or sprinkle basil on sliced tomatoes, it's right there," she says. "No need to drive to the supermarket."

Having plenty of parsley and opal



Fireplace and free-form patio, sited diagonally, embrace the geometric raised bed area.

ILLUSTRATION: NIK SCHULZ

Aging a garden, instantly

Making a new tract garden—or any yard—look like it belongs to an old French farmhouse is easy to do. Here's how Nancy and Greg Putman of Putman Construction & Landscaping (949/552-6610) helped the Brombals achieve their goals.

Use "aged" materials. The bricks that form the paths and define the vegetable beds in the potager, from Robinson Brick Company (www.robinsonbrick.com or 800/477-9002), aren't very old. They've just been tumbled until they look that way. The process not only rounds off the edges of the brick, it fades the color. The flagstones in the dining area are also tumbled.

Simulate Old World style. On the fireplace (page 58), the fine-textured stucco was deliberately over-troweled to a point past smooth, creating a mottled color—a good substitute for centuries of weathering. Provençal-style shutters embellish the garage wall (at right).

Invest in mature trees. Bringing in a California sycamore tree and several birches—all in 36-inch boxes—gave the Brombals needed privacy. (You see the birches behind the umbrellas on pages 58–59.) More important, the large trees made their garden look more established. If they'd opted for young saplings instead, the faux-aged materials and other instant-weathering tricks wouldn't look so convincing.



Small beds separated by brick paths make tending all crops easy. Low growers like Santa Barbara daisy surround pot in the center.

basil to garnish plates and fragrant herbs like lavender and lemon verbena to create casual centerpieces is nice too, she adds. "There's always something in the garden I can use to make meals a little special."

No wonder the Brombals don't have a problem getting Sydney and 12-year-old son Morgan to settle down for family dinners. When the family moves a meal outdoors, dining together gets even easier—and cozier. "We light the fireplace and bring out candles," Linda explains. That creates an atmosphere so mellow that everyone slows down and enjoys the food and each other's company more, she says. "In the garden, even an ordinary meal is a special occasion." ♦

Grayish blue Provençal-style shutters decorate the garage wall; pansies and scented geraniums fill the window box beneath it.

