

**LEAFY GREENS** A plant stand becomes an evergreen display for a collection of antique and vintage dishes glazed a rich, glossy green. This tree includes a rare 19th-century Swansea plate, second row down, at right, distinguished by its deep bowl and elaborate pattern. Wedgwood's chestnut-leaf basket, bottom right, is for serving—what else?—chestnuts. Some green-glaze dishes replicate the outline of a leaf, such as the grape-leaf serving piece at top; the rectangular plate, bottom center, is patterned with a foxglove.

**POCKET WATCH** In the 20th century, green glaze became a staple of flowerpots and other décor for the sun porch, such as the wall pockets, opposite, used here as holiday stockings. The pointy one is Japanese Awaji ware, from the island of Awaji, which is famous for its glazes.

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*the*  
**EMERALD**  
*effect*

*Branch out* BEYOND THE EXPECTED evergreens,  
AND USE *vintage ceramics* TO BRING THE  
*deep hues of the forest* INTO YOUR HOME.

YOUR HEART MAY wilt when you look outside at your hapless garden being anesthetized by winter's dark chill. But turn your back on the not-so-great outdoors and you'll discover a plot ripe for cultivation: your tabletop. For centuries, the dinner table's broad, flat surface has been viewed as a miniature landscape—a park, a garden, a forest, or a field upon which to stage a culinary drama in a sylvan setting.

Fruits, flowers, tendrils, and leaves have been popular tabletop cultivars ever since dinnerware sets first graced the dining rooms of 16th-century nobility. But for the most part, these botanical

motifs were painted onto china, as images are painted on a blank canvas. Then, in 1759, a kind of where-the-wild-things-are transformation began to creep across the table. That was the year in which Josiah Wedgwood founded an earthenware company in Staffordshire, England. He had spent the previous half decade studying glazes with Thomas Whieldon, the reigning master of the technique.

Glazes, which are formed when minerals and salts fuse into a glasslike coating under the intense heat of a kiln, are more complex than their current mass-market ubiquity might suggest. The first lines produced by Wedgwood's eponymous factory were serving pieces shaped like cauliflowers and pineapples and coated in translucent green and yellow glazes. No longer just blank canvases on which to paint a plum or a rose, dishes had become sculptural forms in which shape, texture, and color were in perfect balance.

Despite their beauty, tureens shaped like pineapples and cauliflowers were only briefly popular, and Wedgwood came to prominence on the strength of subsequent designs. But a century later, green glaze came rushing back into vogue, an offshoot of the Victorian passion for majolica. "When you get into the 19th century, it's all fanciful," says Paul Vandekar, a New York dealer in antique tableware.

The same factories that were churning out prawn-shaped tureens and radish-bedecked platters also produced monochromatic green-glazed pieces, in the form of leaves, grasses, and other flora. The Victorians lapped it up, their appetite fueled by a madness for botany: Well-to-do aristocrats prided themselves on filling their gardens and parlors with botanical specimens collected by seafaring explorers who had scavenged the wilds of China, South America, and the South Sea Islands. Leaves had become a status symbol.

It was also fashionable at the time to serve each type of food, from relishes to fruits, on its very own serving piece. "These dishes were a way to bring spring and other seasons into the home at other times of the year," Vandekar says.

The green-glaze craze peaked by 1880, then began to abate. "By 1900, only Wedgwood amongst the English manufacturers appears to have been producing," says Ben Tulk, of Madelena Antiques, an Internet dealer in majolica. But the public's craving for green never died. "Green glaze became popular again in the 20th century," says Fritz Karch, editorial director of collecting at *Martha Stewart Living*. "Portuguese examples were available in department stores. And Japanese Awaji ware featured a similar-color glaze."

The mishmash of countries and manufacturers may only add to the pleasure of collecting green-glaze ware. "You can choose this quality of color and not be so strict about seeking out particular objects," Karch says. "There's the high and the low. Plates can be up to \$200 apiece. But you can also find it on a budget at the thrift store—vintage department-store copies of the fancy majolica stuff."

Indeed, for collectors, the draw isn't pedigree or provenance, but the color itself. "It's very seductive—the way the glaze pools in the crevices," Karch says. "It goes light and dark, so there's a great range of shades. It's like looking into water." And right about now, that beats looking out the window at a world that seems to have forgotten what it means to be green.





**TURN OVER AN OLD LEAF** A bed of moss holds a collection of butter pats, used here to serve appetizers. The geranium-leaf-shaped example at top is 19th-century English, the square one at left is from China, and the center dish is 20th-century American. On the table, lower right, is a Victorian fern-patterned relish dish. Green Bristol glassware and Georgian serving forks complete the setting.

**GLAZE CRAZE** Green glaze was used for serving pieces, dessert sets, and table accessories, opposite. In the 19th century, each dish had a purpose—footed compotes for fruit, perhaps, and low dishes for garden vegetables.



**GREEN THUMB** It's easy to cultivate a collection of green-glaze earthenware, even if you don't have a lot of money to spend. You can begin acquiring 20th-century pieces as you develop an eye for the rarer 19th-century pieces. Here, an inexpensive 1950s flowerpot holds a tabletop tree. A once-fancy, now-chipped Victorian plate is placed beneath it.

**VERDANT SETTING** Whoever said holiday dishes have to match? After all, plants never clash in nature. Three mismatched pairs of green-glaze plates, opposite, are set for a dinner party. At top and bottom are rare Spode examples, with elegant wreaths of leaves as borders. At far left and right are more common geranium-leaf patterns. Grape leaves gently wrap around the edge of the plates at lower left and top right. A large compote is the centerpiece. The pale-green goblets are mid-20th-century French opaline glass.

*Created by James Dunlinson, Fritz Karch, and Quy Nguyen*

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