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## **Editorial: Peas in our time**

### **Armistice needed with front yard gardeners**

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Sacramento, which once earned the label as "the city of lawns and yawns," is finally experiencing some eye-catching front yards.

Amateur horticulturists are planting their front plots with mixtures of native perennials, ornamental plants and, yes, vegetable gardens.

What is the proper role of city officials as these green-thumbers engage in some botanical experimentation?

They should stay out of the way.

We no longer live in an Ozzie and Harriet world where all yards are mowed, all grass is Bermuda and the only ornamentals are azaleas. Unfortunately, several council members seem to be stuck in a 1950s time warp. Despite calls to update the city's code to reflect modern sensibilities, the city has put forward a proposal that remains hostile to fresh produce from the front yard.

The proposed ordinance -- which will go before a City Council committee today -- requires that 80 percent of a front yard be free of vegetables, with no veggie plants higher than four feet. This would effectively restrict bean stalks, pea trellises and tomatoes. (Have city officials ever tried to top a tomato plant and still get a crop?)

You might recall how this story unfolded. Section 17.68.010 was an archaic section of the Sacramento code until two years ago, when a neighbor ratted on Karen Baumann and her front-yard veggies in east Sacramento. Baumann was fined \$800 for violating Section 17.68.010, which says that front yards "shall be landscaped, irrigated and maintained with primarily low ground cover and turf."

The city later dropped the case, but, like a heap of compost, the debate on front-yard veggies has continued to ripen.

The city had a chance to adopt a reasonable ordinance in 2005. It would have given property owners discretion on plantings. Lawn cops on the council nixed the proposal.

As a general rule, government should stay out of people's bedrooms and their front yards. If you agree, call your City Council representative and say, "Give peas a chance."

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