

Get into guerrilla gardening

Adrienne Wyper / 23 April 2019

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Unearth the facts about the growing trend of freestyle cultivation of overlooked, unloved plots of public land.



Abandoned plots can be transformed into community gardens, growing spaces and wildlife habitats

Guerrilla gardening is enriching your environment – for everyone – by growing flowers and edible crops on land that doesn't belong to you. Some guerrilla gardening might be illegal (mainly because of trespassing laws) but it has become so mainstream now that many councils are embracing the idea and will grant permission to guerrilla gardeners to tend to neglected areas of council property so if you've spotted a patch of ground or tatty raised beds that need some TLC it's well worth getting in touch with the council or landowner for permission before you do anything. The activity has so many benefits, such as enhancing appearance, cheering up local people, making the area look cared-for and supporting wildlife, that you might find there is a lot of support for it.

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How did it start?

In New York, in 1973, a financial crisis resulted in vacant lots (empty plots of land) and abandoned buildings. A non-profit environmental group called the Green Guerrillas, began cultivating these eyesores by throwing 'seed bombs' – balls of seed, clay and soil – over their fences.

In the UK, possibly the best-known guerrilla gardener is Richard Reynolds, who lived in inner-city London and set about cultivating overlooked spots such as traffic islands, social housing planters and more. In 2008 he wrote the book [On Guerrilla Gardening](#) (Bloomsbury, £12.99), which grew out of his blog.

In many locations, guerrilla gardening has now moved into the mainstream, with some local authorities embracing this idea of cultivating every conceivable corner, such as Todmorden's Incredibly Edible, in West Yorkshire, growing fruit, veg and herbs in public spaces, for everyone to share, which started with a small group of people in 2008, growing herbs on grass verges. Find out about setting up your own [Incredibly Edible](#) group.

Grow Wild, the outreach initiative of [Royal Botanic Gardens Kew](#), works to encourage people to transform spaces, including shared ones, with native wildflowers, and offers some free seed kits.

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How can I get started?

If you look around, you can find potential plots on roadside verges, railway embankments, empty planters belonging to the local authority or businesses, or communal space near your home. With the latter, you might want to canvass support and recruit more volunteers to help.

You can rehome any surplus plants you have in your garden, or propagate some. Gardeners often give away plants on sites such as Freecycle. And, of course, you can buy seeds or plants specifically for 'your' plot. Save money by trying the reduced-price sections at garden centres. Species that flourish in the local area may stand a better chance of success.

Richard Reynolds suggests choosing large specimens, and those with impact: 'Make your garden stand out from the context in which it sits. Wow the public into appreciating it. Eye-catching plants will make it obvious an "attack" has occurred. Using a mature flowering plant will create a big impact immediately and so help ensure your planting is not overlooked or mistaken as a weed.'

You can make your own seed bombs for tossing onto inaccessible areas behind fences or above ground level; they're also great for dropping onto bare patches of soil you pass. Seed bombs are also now available to buy.

Another easy, and well-established, idea is to plant around the base of street trees, a practice that is welcomed by several local authorities including Hammersmith & Fulham in west London, whose leader said: 'We will support any residents who want to do this and look forward to seeing more of our borough in bloom.' Hammersmith & Fulham even provide [instructions for planting under trees](#) on the council website. You could contact your local authority's tree officer for their opinion and advice.

Once the plot is growing, all you need to do is water it if necessary, tidy it up (weeding, pruning, litter-picking), add plants – and look out for a new location!

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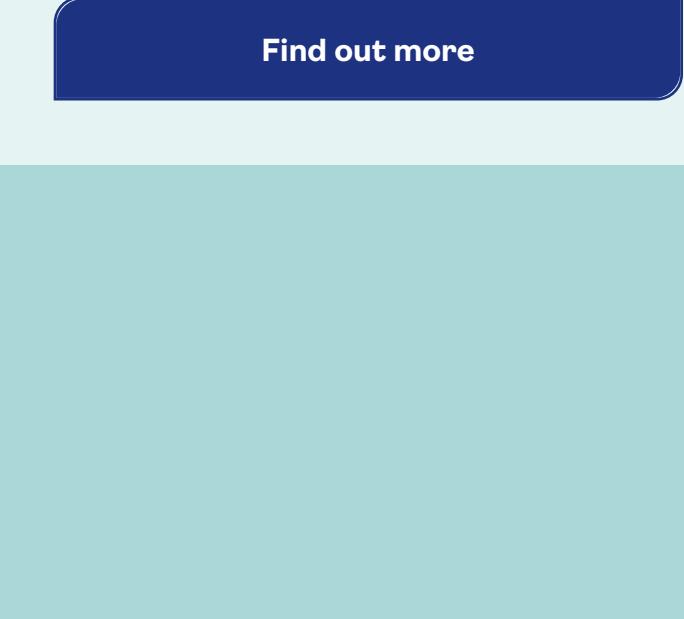
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