

Introduction

Have you ever been walking down some gray and dreary street, feeling gray and dreary yourself, when you spotted a flower growing out of the pavement and it changed your whole day?

Me neither. But it could happen if more people became guerrilla gardeners. That's the hope of this book.

It's meant to be two things: 1) a manual for people using plants to reclaim public space for the public good, and 2) a manifesto inspiring you to join them. So it's a manual-festo. Not quite a call to arms, but something better: a case for shovels (long-handled to save your back, although trowels are great for clandestine work).

You could also consider it a guidebook to urban adventure. Guerrilla gardening is exciting, tiring, heartening, enlightening and more. You'll feel a warm glow of achievement at growing beauty out of urban blight. Blisters and sore muscles too, but the pain will be sweetened by knowing it comes from a body rediscovering ancient rhythms of work on the land. But let's not stop there. The more lasting changes, and the real blossoming, may happen within.

Guerrilla gardening offers a way to see your city in a different light. You may redefine your role as a citizen as you discover new ground on which to make a stand. Start by shedding that urban exoskeleton of cynicism and dread. Continue by merging into a larger movement of all things living. No longer a passive consumer, you become what has never been needed more: an active citizen engaged in your environment.

Guided by an eco-based code of ethics, armed with a determination to make the landscape itself a declaration of *interdepend-*

If you throw back your shoulders and look up into the sky, you will see what else is yours.

— ALFRED CARL HOTTES

ence, watch what happens when you move to the pulse of the planet. You have environmental insights and political epiphanies. You begin to reshape your days to reflect a more natural world view. You learn how to merge with the cycles, seasons and flows. Your hands get dirty and your back gets sore and you love it, because you know it means you're truly alive. Count on all this to not only sharpen the significance of your everyday routines but — stay with me here — to put you on the right side of history in the most important battle of our time: the struggle to determine how we'll all live together in the cities of the future.

Phew.

Got all that?

Good. Because now comes the fair warning.

Guerrilla gardening is not for everyone. You should know this from the start. It's not all sunshine and daisies. The title may sound romantic, but the work can be grueling. Sites may, by definition, be uninviting. Growing conditions are often harsh. Routine chores can be a logistical grind.

*You say fence, we say link
in the global struggle for
urban salad liberation.*



No matter how hard you try and how many hurdles you leap, it may still not be enough. Some of your campaigns will end in defeat. The emotional high you reach on one project — say in turning a chain link fence into a living salad — will only make the drop seem that much steeper on your next when the Man (or the Man’s saggy-uniformed security guy) rips out your entire field of zinnias.

Ever onward

It’s never fun to lose, especially when the loss involves not just some seedlings but the brilliant future they once contained. Yet that must not deter you. A guerrilla gardener cannot dwell. You must forget that the odds are always against you and defeat forever a few boot-stomps away. Remind yourself instead that every garden is a gamble, then repeat your vow to keep growing.

What else can go wrong?

Oh, right. You might get arrested.

It would be unusual. But since you may be, strictly speaking, planting on property which at least in some literal sense you don’t exactly *own*, legal implications are possible. No point denying it. There are laws on these things. They could be used against you. You could go to jail.

So let’s be honest. If you feel for whatever reason that you’re not up to the mission, put this book down, back slowly away and return to your comfortable life. No one will fault you. On the contrary. You know your limits better than anyone. You understand the importance of staying within a comfort zone when making key life choices. So do what you must. Thank you for coming. And good luck.

Still with us?

Good. Because that warning was just a ruse to get the naysayers out of the room. The reality is that while you may get questioned or even stopped, it’s unlikely you would ever be charged. Unless you wanted to be, of course, to make a case or because you feel a jail cell makes the best backdrop for a political declaration.

It turns out the declining crime rate all over North America has yet to reach the point where police squads must busy themselves with vegetables. And even if you were by some mean quirk brought in and then charged, a conviction would still be unex-

*The force that through
the green fuse
drives the flower
Drives my green age*

— DYLAN THOMAS

pected. Who would rule against you? There are 90 million gardeners in North America. You need just one of them on your jury or in the judge's chair. Gardeners are a tribe. They understand each other. They commiserate. Weather, slugs, powdery mildew? They know, and how terrible. Cops who don't even grow their own tomatoes? Tsk-tsk.

Even so, if the prospect of a mug shot and a rap sheet is still making you nervous (implausible as it may be), you needn't worry. There's plenty to be done in guerrilla gardening that is entirely legal. That part is up to you.

You rule

In fact, every part is up to you. Guerrilla gardening is autonomy in green. You don't have to join a club or pay any dues or accept any codes. You even get to define it for yourself. I call it "gardening public space with or without permission." But as definitions go, I have to admit, that's pretty thin.

The gardening part is easy enough, if we can agree it means "tending a defined space for the cultivation or appreciation of natural things, usually plants but not necessarily if you include weird art like those giant blue tubes representing pencils or something."

DESIGN TIP

Start out small. Enthusiasm burns hotter than regular fuel. A common newbie mistake is to take on too much space. It's all exciting and fun at the initial stage, but later if the maintenance chores prove too troublesome you're more likely to give the whole thing up. Better to start with a smaller patch and build on your success. Remember, this is gardening, a battle won by the resilient.

Woody Guthrie's most famous song "This Land Is Your Land" was written in 1940 but that's probably not the version you learned in school. The milder form was tame enough to become an election campaign song for George Bush Senior, backed by the sound of Woody spinning in his grave. The original, penned in response to Irving Berlin's feel-good "God Bless America," featured Woody's radical critique of a society divided by poverty and greed. This verse could be the guerrilla gardener's theme song:

As I went walking, I saw a sign there,
And on the sign, it said "No Trespassing."
But on the other side, it didn't say nothing,
That side was made for you and me.³

The harder question is: what public space? In a time of growing gated communities and video surveillance, when a soccer stadium can make 1,000 fans take off their *pants* to avoid upsetting a corporate sponsor,¹ what does “public space” even mean anymore?

One traditional definition uses the right of access. Public space is where everyone is allowed to go, to do whatever they want, so long as it’s legal. I can wear an offensive t-shirt and hand out political leaflets in my local park, but probably not in my local shopping mall if the mall owner has different standards.

A problem with this distinction for guerrilla gardeners is that it’s based not on how life really works (ecology) but on the law. And what good is a lawyer when both the park and the mall’s planter boxes may need our help?

So let’s use “public space” here in its widest sense to mean all the places we as a society share environmentally. This can include private land even if the only access is visual. It would follow that cities, those grand experiments in social living, have a lot of public spaces: parks, streets, lots, fields, industrial sites and more...the firehouse lawn, the gas station shrubbery, the bank building’s parking lot.

Whatever the title deeds say, we as a society created these places the way the Mayans built the pyramids at Chichén Itzá. Our shared



Build it and they will come, eventually, to pick the fruit in this community orchard in East Vancouver.

*The revolution is inside, in
the determination of mind.*

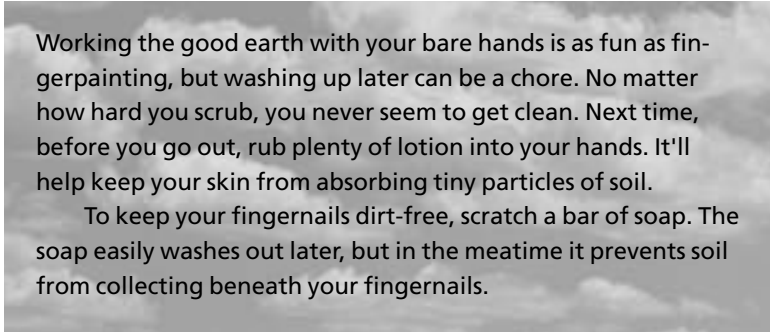
— THE XIV DALAI LAMA

environment is defined by both the natural and built spaces around us. Together they make up our urban ecosystem. Because everything in an ecosystem is linked, these places affect the city and those living in it in countless physical, mental, spiritual and other ways. So enhancing these public spaces with guerrilla gardening can be seen as a public right. Maybe even a public duty. But don't let me go too far.

The “with or without permission” clause in my definition was added only to emphasize the all-inclusive nature of the pursuit. Let no one try to tell you your project doesn't count because it's on the wrong type of property or because you had the gumption to ask the land owner first. You may be surprised to learn how many will say yes.

With guerrilla gardeners always free to choose their own level of commitment and all acting on their own initiatives, how can we define success? The proof is in the planting. Does it look better? Function better ecologically? Make birds and butterflies happy? If the answers are no, *what* are you planting? Never mind that for now. Will your next operation do better? The only definition of failure should lie in giving up.

Because guerrilla gardening is such a life-affirming activity, I'm tempted to declare at least one condition for inclusion: non-violence. But who am I to say? I once asked the Dalai Lama whether violence could ever be justified. I expected the Nobel Peace Prize winner to issue a standard denial; I just needed the quote. Instead he said it wasn't that easy, because there may be times when violence is necessary. “What counts for any action are your motivation and the results,” he explained. Note that for him,



Working the good earth with your bare hands is as fun as fingerpainting, but washing up later can be a chore. No matter how hard you scrub, you never seem to get clean. Next time, before you go out, rub plenty of lotion into your hands. It'll help keep your skin from absorbing tiny particles of soil.

To keep your fingernails dirt-free, scratch a bar of soap. The soap easily washes out later, but in the meantime it prevents soil from collecting beneath your fingernails.

motivation involves compassion even for one's enemies and results may be judged best after generations. So where does that leave the rest of us? Wondering, as usual. In the meantime I recommend not blowing up stuff while you work on your better nature, and keep on planting as part of the practice.

School's out

By this point you may be wondering whether you have what it takes to become a guerrilla gardener.

Perhaps I can answer by describing my own introduction to the urban wild life. I went on my first mission when I was 11 years old. In fact, I led it.

This was in the build-up to Earth Day, which we had learned about all week in school. By Friday I was brimming with it. I knew what side I was on. Pollution was the enemy. I even knew where the enemy was: an empty city lot I walked by every day on the way to school.

That weekend I enlisted two pals to help pick up and carry out all the garbage. We also pulled out weeds by the armload. Then we got flower seeds from somewhere (I hope we didn't steal them) and planted what we believed would be the revival of a ratty patch of land leading to the triumph of ecology all over town.

I don't remember the flowers ever blooming. In retrospect, watering might have helped. But that wasn't the most important thing. Our little band of three — at least for a time — was a part of things. We were engaged. That empty lot, too creepy to play in with its towering weeds and broken glass, could intimidate us no longer. We were making it ours. But not just ours. We were making it everybody's. For two idyllic days we hummed with the fervor of the righteous as we hauled and dug and sweat. It really is a shame about that water.

Some good must have come out of the experience. I went on to become a community-based ecologist. Eventually. The high school years were a bit of a lapse. My strongest connection to the landscape then involved a loathing of our suburban lawn which my father, apparently even less enamored, ordered me to cut every weekend.

Things picked up in university where I studied politics and environmental studies. One of my nicknames (which fortunately

*Landscape is personal and
tribal history made visible.*

— YI-FU TUAN

I'm old enough to remember the 1950s, when public connoted good and private was considered suspect, greedy, untrustworthy. But then I saw it turn around, from public as bad schools, inefficient government, and slums to private as a transcendent force in society, the hope of Fortune 500.

— LEWIS LAPHAM

didn't last) was "Nature Boy." It may have had something to do with not wearing shoes. Or maybe the semester I lived in the forest behind campus, where I learned a valuable lesson. All other things being equal, it's good to have friends with hot showers.

By and by I graduated and, with no other prospects, went into journalism. This seemed to suit me when I got a newspaper job in Japan. At least I enjoyed it, getting paid to write not only about the concrete onslaught of Tokyo but also on things such as the Penan nomads' anti-logging campaign in Borneo and the native gardening trend in Australia.

More recently I began to wonder about doing more than reporting on the environment. I decided I wanted to shape it too. After all, it isn't some big external unapproachable thing out there — it's all around, far, near and inside us too. It seemed prudent to know how, so I went back to school to get a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture. I combined taking courses with previous experience in tree planting and orchard management to become a certified arborist. I helped launch an engaged ecology group that teaches citizens to plant and care for the urban forest. And I continued to do volunteer work on community greening campaigns.

Right of way

One day a neighborhood group asked for advice on a project. It involved an enthusiastic crowd of keeners, some prize heritage apple trees, and a scheme to plant them through guerrilla gardening. I didn't think they should do it.

The idea was certainly intriguing. The group had received dozens of donated apple trees, bare-root and ready for planting. They had found a supply of free shipping crates that would work as planter boxes. The only problem: no room to start a community orchard. The obvious choice, the local community garden, had no extra space. Beside the garden, however, and separating it from the park next door, was a short, potholed, troublesome street the residents had been trying to get closed for years. It was hardly a city conduit, with T-stops at either end, but its remoteness did make it popular with johns bringing in prostitutes, garden thieves with trucks who steal in bulk and illegal campers. The group's suggestion? Put the trees right *on* the street.

No sooner was the idea mentioned than the room came alive. People loved it. Everyone started talking at once. If brilliant ideas produced floating light bulbs we would have needed sunglasses. Finally I couldn't help cutting through the giddiness to ask: "But what will the city say?"

"Who cares?" Followed by laughter and genial hoots of derision at the notion of the city having anything pertinent to contribute.

"Yes, well, maybe," I went on, feeling like the hand-wringing sidekick in an adventure film, written in to moan about everything that can go wrong. "The thing is, planting that many trees would take a while. Someone would probably see you."

"They might." Shrugs. "So?"

"So...they would stop you."

"They might *try*."



Where to grow? The answer from the plant world is: everywhere.

“Oh. Well...what if the city didn’t notice, not then, but they do later? It’s still their street. They’ll come and take the trees out.”

“Not if we sit in front of the bulldozers.” Cheers this time, and laughter, and calls of “Now you’re talking,” and “Right on.”

Such civic passion is not unusual, especially in committee rooms and far from the looming bulldozer blade, but this group was from the neighborhood that had stopped the city from building a highway through downtown Vancouver in the 1970s. This was an era of urban planners all over North America driven by the vision of happy people in the suburbs streaking to and from their jobs in gleaming downtown towers via big, wide cars on big, wide freeways. The planners got their wish, wrecking cities all over the continent as one urban core after another turned into a wasteland of commercial highrises and cars but few people, especially after dark.

Too few cities were spared the gutting effects of the well-intended renovations. In Vancouver the plans went off the rails when, after replacing a few blocks of turn-of-the-century houses with apartment buildings that Brezhnev would have loved, the planners ran into determined opposition. The highway scheme was shelved, and today Vancouver runs a thriving cottage industry hosting urban planners from around the world who come to learn how to nurture a livable city.

Even with this caliber of citizen, I felt a clutch of misgivings about the enterprise. “What if a city crew comes when no one’s around, takes out all the trees and sends you a bill?”

“We don’t pay.”

“We’ve been after them for years about that street,” another added, “and we’ve never had any response.”

People started talking all at once about public meetings, potholes, drugs, thieves and prostitutes. It grew into a heated agreement.

“I shouldn’t have to explain used condoms to kindergarteners,” said one teacher.

I nodded over and again, familiar with the arguments and the anger at city inaction. I knew that apple trees in planter boxes would do well and beautify that street. They went on the side of the street, as it turned out, so they wouldn’t be blocking traffic. And

DESIGN TIP

Think of how your space will look, but also how the world will look *from* your space. Is there a spot where the view is really special? It might make a good place for a bench, or a bend in the path that encourages a pause. The best view may not necessarily be the most sweeping one. In fact, showing off everything at once can sometimes make a spectacular sight get too familiar too soon. Think of framing a picture.

maybe it could be the first step toward reclaiming the neighborhood. One big park certainly did sound better than the status quo.

“Okay, I’m in,” I said, silently congratulating myself on knowing at least when it was time to shut up and learn.

There are two categories of guerrilla gardening operation. The first involves undercover work. Often performed at night, when outdoor workers are absent and potential witnesses in bed, the project is executed quickly and quietly. Get in, do the job, and get out before anyone has time to think about why all those eager people aren’t employed during the daytime like other landscapers. You plant and run, perhaps literally if you hear sirens.

In the other type of operation you work by day. You don’t skulk or hide behind dark hoodies or bandana masks. You wear work clothes and work gloves. If you happen to have a safety vest, or any kind of occupational vest, wear it. A worker’s vest is like a backstage pass. If anyone stares, you offer the slack-jawed nod of the hourly wage earner and resume digging. People see what they expect to see, even when the evidence is against it. Act as if you belong and everyone will assume you do.

So it was that, not long after the meeting, 20 or so people looking like any other group from the community garden appeared on the site. Work parties are normally held on Sunday, but this was Tuesday, a regular day for city employees. We had just unloaded 30 crates from a semi-trailer and begun filling them with compost and wood chips when a car appeared, bearing the emblem of the city’s Engineering Department. Just our luck — an emissary from the largest, best-funded and most powerful department in the city.

The first rule of guerrilla gardening should be “Get Away With It,” I thought ruefully at that moment when it seemed we were hooped before we’d planted a single tree.

“Keep moving,” someone muttered from the side of his mouth, chain gang-style. I stole a glance up from the wheelbarrow I was pushing. The others were staring at their boots.

“Don’t anyone say anything,” someone hissed as the car drew nearer.

“I’ll do the talking,” an older member of the group announced, to my relief, but even he looked like a poster for criminal contrition

Freedom lies in being bold.

— ROBERT FROST

as his eyes darted in every direction but at the driver. “Whatever happens,” he whispered, “you guys keep shoveling.”

Won’t that be hard with handcuffs, I wondered as the car rolled almost to a stop before us, the driver turning to look. Not much older than a teenager, perhaps a junior engineer, he seemed distinctly bored. A guy on a morning break, looking for a quiet spot to sip his coffee. Nodding vaguely in our direction, he rolled past and was gone. We hadn’t even registered.

With the sudden reprieve, we laughed and joked about who had been the most nervous. We also quickened the pace. One visit like that was a lucky pass. Who knew what category of municipal employee might show up next?

Ten minutes later we all did when a police patrol car turned in and cruised up the street toward us.

We cursed bitterly. Junior must have called them. The Man doesn’t get his own hands dirty, no. He has the whole jack-booted apparatus of the State to do his thuggery.

But this cop barely slowed down, didn’t bother to glance. We clearly weren’t his table either. Later a fire truck drove by with the same heartwarming lack of concern. No one from the city was

*Access denied...except to
individuals with hands and feet.*



interested in our planting project. In our vests and work gloves we looked as if we knew what we were doing. No hoodies, no masks.

By mid-afternoon the trees were planted, staked and watered. Later that spring, the first blossoms appeared. And at least one small section of a formerly unloved street was now a part of the urban citizens' revolution to green the city and save the world.

The lesson: guerrilla gardening worked. And it worked in spite of me. So if you're still wondering whether you're up to the task, remember my example and do not follow it. Be bold. Courage can feed itself, if you take off the leash and let it run.

Now fear this

For the vital question of why you might want to put yourself through episodes such as this, consider a few statistics I gleaned in a few scary minutes of net searching:

- One-third of the world's amphibian species may soon disappear. No one knows why.
- The earth is in its warmest period in recorded history, with at least some of the hot air coming from dolts yelling at Al Gore.
- Marine mammals are dying in the Pacific, and we do know why. Their brains are rotting from pollution.
- Almost one third of North America's 645 native bird species are in decline.
- Half the world's rainforests have been destroyed within the last century. Every minute (the time it takes you to read this paragraph, if you go over it a few times) another 95 acres get razed.

Also the chemicals in breast milk. Asthma in urban areas. Dwindling sperm counts. More cancers of everything.

Let's stop there. This book is not about gloom and doom. It's about how we fight back. I wish I could say it's ultimately about how the truth will out, love will reign and environmental grooviness spread over the land like honey over toast, but that would take more optimism than I have to muster. Of course I try to look on the bright side, if only because it's a more successful strategy for getting things done, but as humans we've got an awful spotty record to have to build on. Cities have never quite worked before. No urban center has ever lasted. What is the history of civilization? The story of one failed city after another.

Foods high in antioxidants are believed to slow the effects of aging. The theory hasn't been proved. But the idea is that antioxidants counter the damaging effects of "free radicals" in the blood. And you thought "free radicals" were a good thing. Here, according to research reported in the *Journal of Agricultural Food Chemistry*, are the 20 most antioxidant-rich foods. How many can you grow in a guerrilla garden?

1. Red beans
2. Wild blueberries
3. Red kidney beans
4. Pinto beans
5. Cultivated blueberries
6. Cranberries
7. Artichokes
8. Blackberries
9. Prunes
10. Raspberries
11. Strawberries
12. Red delicious apples
13. Granny Smith apples
14. Pecans
15. Sweet cherries
16. Black plums
17. Russet potatoes
18. Black beans
19. Plums
20. Gala apples⁴

The first thing I tell people to do is plant a garden.

— THOMAS PAWLICK
author of *The End of Food*

City of no return

But let's put that in perspective. Hominids have been around for three or four million years. During that time we got pretty good at hunting and gathering. As *Homo sapiens* we've mostly been farmers for the past 10,000 years, and if you ignore the cruel fact of recurrent famines, we've done all right there too. But now we've evolved again, this time into something quite different. According to the United Nations, more than half the people on earth now live in cities.² And with a million more people moving into cities every week, it's obvious there's no going back. We are an urban species, a planet of city people. It's an arrangement never attempted before on a scale so grand. Cities may not have worked so far, but that's not a helpful excuse because this time we have no other choice.

Like some people, I've had a love-hate relationship with most of the urban areas I've been in. Typical for an edge species thriving in the interface between ecosystems, I'm drawn by all the rich opportunities the complexity of cities presents. I'm happy to join in the frothy mix of cultures. But I'm also as affected as anyone by the onslaughts of visual blight, pollution, noise, crime and social degradation.

In studying landscape architecture I learned to see public space as a design problem — and “problem” is the right word. How did we let it get this bad? The influence of profit-making corporations on every part of our lives is so vast we've almost stopped noticing. Every big city in North America has more private security guards than public police officers. Shutting yourself off from society no longer marks you as eccentric, it just means you can afford to live in a gated community. In one neighborhood mentioned in this morning's newspaper, residents — evidently proud of the fact — put up a public sign announcing 24 hours per day of recorded video surveillance.

We don't have to live this way. Many people don't realize yet that we are far from powerless. We are as strong as we choose to be. In spite of near-total government capitulation to corporate domination, we are the ones who create the greatest living achievement of humankind, the city. (Yes, I did mean to write “greatest” and also “living.”) We are the civic designers and social engineers and urban planners who invent these collective masterpieces through the

DESIGN TIP

A garden is more than the plants. Structures provide visual stability through the seasons. They can be used to lead people or their eyes through a space. Before you get out the shovels and tug on the work gloves, think of how you might use fences, walls, arbors, paths and works of art to enhance or highlight the growing stuff.

daily decisions we make on where and how we live, work, shop and play.

I decided to write *Guerrilla Gardening: A Manualfesto* to join the growing campaign to help cities bloom. By combining what I've learned through reporting from urban areas on six continents with what I studied about urban ecology and tried firsthand as a community planter and activist, I hope to make the case that:

1. Cities are too important to leave to people who don't care.
2. Gardening is easy, although sometimes tricky when you don't have permission.
3. The planet can be saved by committed gardeners because
4. We are planting the seeds of a brighter future and
5. Our time has come.



*Meet me at my office,
third tree from the left.*

How to use this book

I called this book a manualfesto to mean a how-to guide with why-for inspiration for anyone interested in planting beyond their own property. It contains the most helpful information on the topic I could find, some from personal experience but more from asking those who know more than I ever will.

Included are first-person “If I can do it...” accounts of guerilla gardeners describing what did and didn’t work. More of the former, fortunately, although we certainly needn’t avoid the latter because mistakes are good opportunities to learn. Also included are interviews with various experts in first-person excerpted and longer Q&A formats. Each chapter also has a short “Power Plant” section describing some proven winners you might want to try.

You could read the book from start to finish in the given order, but that’s up to you. No one’s watching. If you prefer, turn straight

These things will sell for thousands once Pottery Barn catches on.



to the chapters most applicable to your situation. Or you could flip around at random. Added throughout are plenty of boxes, info bars, fun facts, growing tips, design suggestions and interesting or perhaps even inspirational quotes. These were chosen to make the reading experience a pleasure as well as an education. They're also meant to help those with diminished attention spans stay focused (but not you...you even read inside parentheses). The idea is to take either the lesson or the spirit of what you find in here and apply it to your own campaign furthering the green insurgency.

Are you the one?

Wait, let me answer for you. The answer is yes.

The rest of the book is an elaboration on this idea, with what I hope is enough detail to prove it.

If you opened the book because you wanted to improve the environment — stick around, we're just getting started.

If you're still unsure, but curious enough to wonder whether you fit in, Chapter One might help by providing an overview of where guerrilla gardening is from and where it may be heading.

Let's say you read that, and you're keen. What next? Chapter Two explains how to find a spot to start, beginning with advice on using an ecological approach in evaluating city spaces.

Now that you have a site, what are going to do with it? Chapter Three discusses the things you'll need to begin creating your opus on the land.

This, for some, is where it starts to get scary. Not the silly legal stuff, but the stricter laws of nature. What to do with the fact that you're a black thumb squashing every plant to have come under your care? Worry no more. Chapter Four explains the basic laws of gardening in non-technical and easy to understand terms. It's meant to reassure you that you can indeed grow things. Or maybe you still can't, but why do you think nurseries have end-of-season sales?

Once you've learned to see your city as a living thing, you're bound to wonder where all the rest of its creatures are. Chapter Five is all about creating spaces for urban dwellers beyond the human realm — of which there are millions. If only they could buy books too.

What's the biggest crop plant in North America? If you answered "lawn grass," you probably grew up in the suburbs. And you'd be right. Biggest and dumbest, we might have said, for huge amounts of effort, money, resources, poisons and angst go into those curiously drab, even aseptic, spreads of green. Chapter Six explains how to turn a lawn into a meadow, or (if that seems ambitious) at least into something more interesting.

Chapter Seven takes you to the peak of guerrilla gardening, the dream site, the spot you plant and tend so impressively that they let you keep it...also known as a community garden. This is where you learn how to start one and, just as importantly, how to keep one.

In any creative campaign it can sometimes help to suddenly turn the tables. Chapter Eight makes the case that you should not be bound by any limits, including the ones that say you must be contrary. Most ecological restoration work is done through official channels. This route isn't for all guerrilla gardeners (and you should be warned the meetings alone can be deadly), but if you do well here you can make a lasting impact.

Chapter Nine describes what you can do when you're not out pulling weeds and planting seeds. It explains how to pass the message of urban greening on. Ideas, after all, are seeds that may bloom into something grand.

What? Not be out planting things? The conclusion winds up by contesting the very idea. It includes some hopeful thoughts for the future along with a final exhortation to stop reading books, grab your tools and get out the door. There's a world out there that needs help. And you, green-spirited soldier, are the one to help it.