

Diarmuid Gavin's **GARDEN DESIGNS**

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**Designing Your
Own Garden**

From drawing
board to reality

One Man and his Dig

Tales from an
allotment novice

Guerrilla Gardening

A report from the frontlines

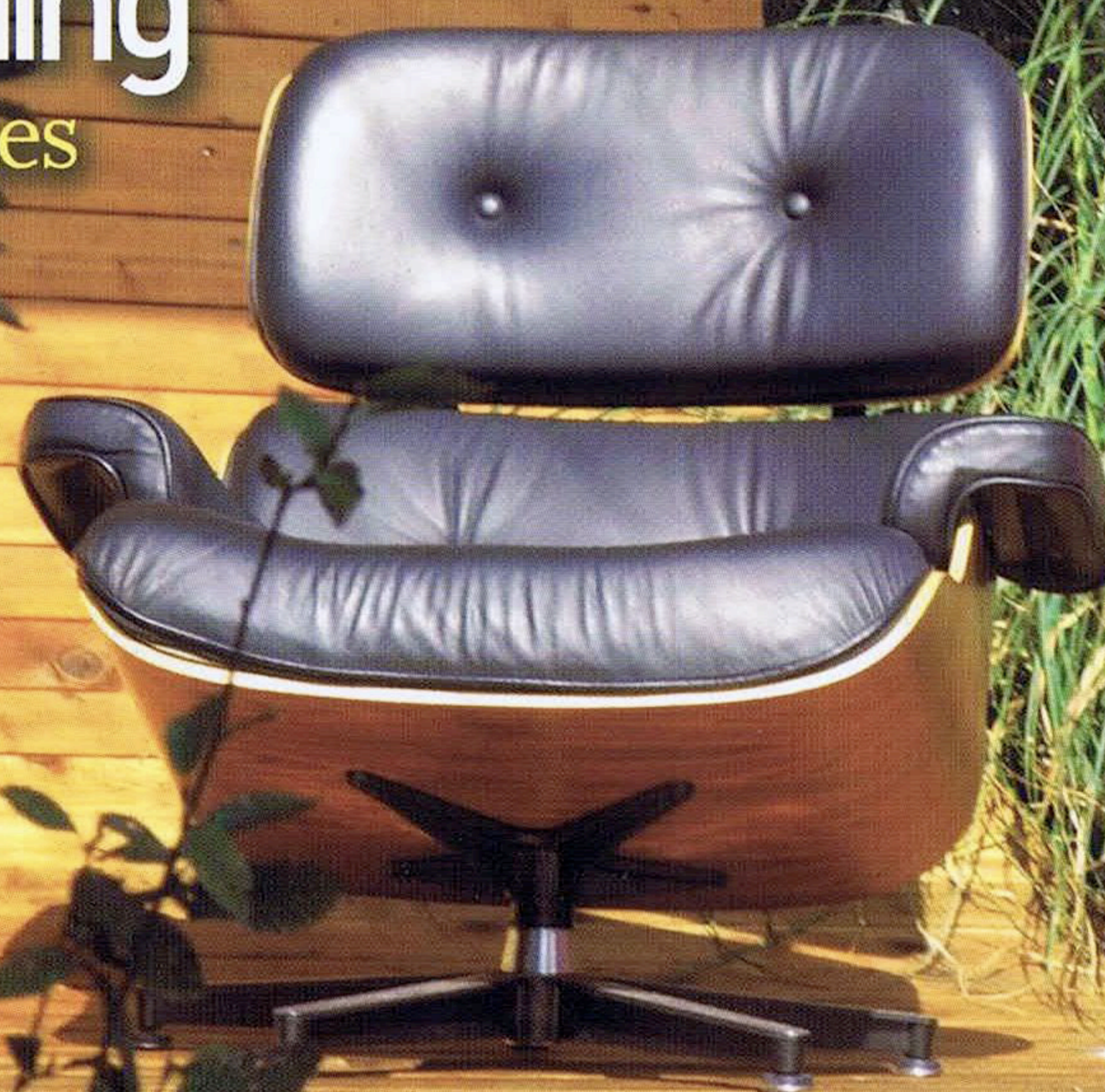
Grand Designs

The pavilions of the
Serpentine Gallery

WIN

The Ultimate
Leaf Blower
and accessories
worth over

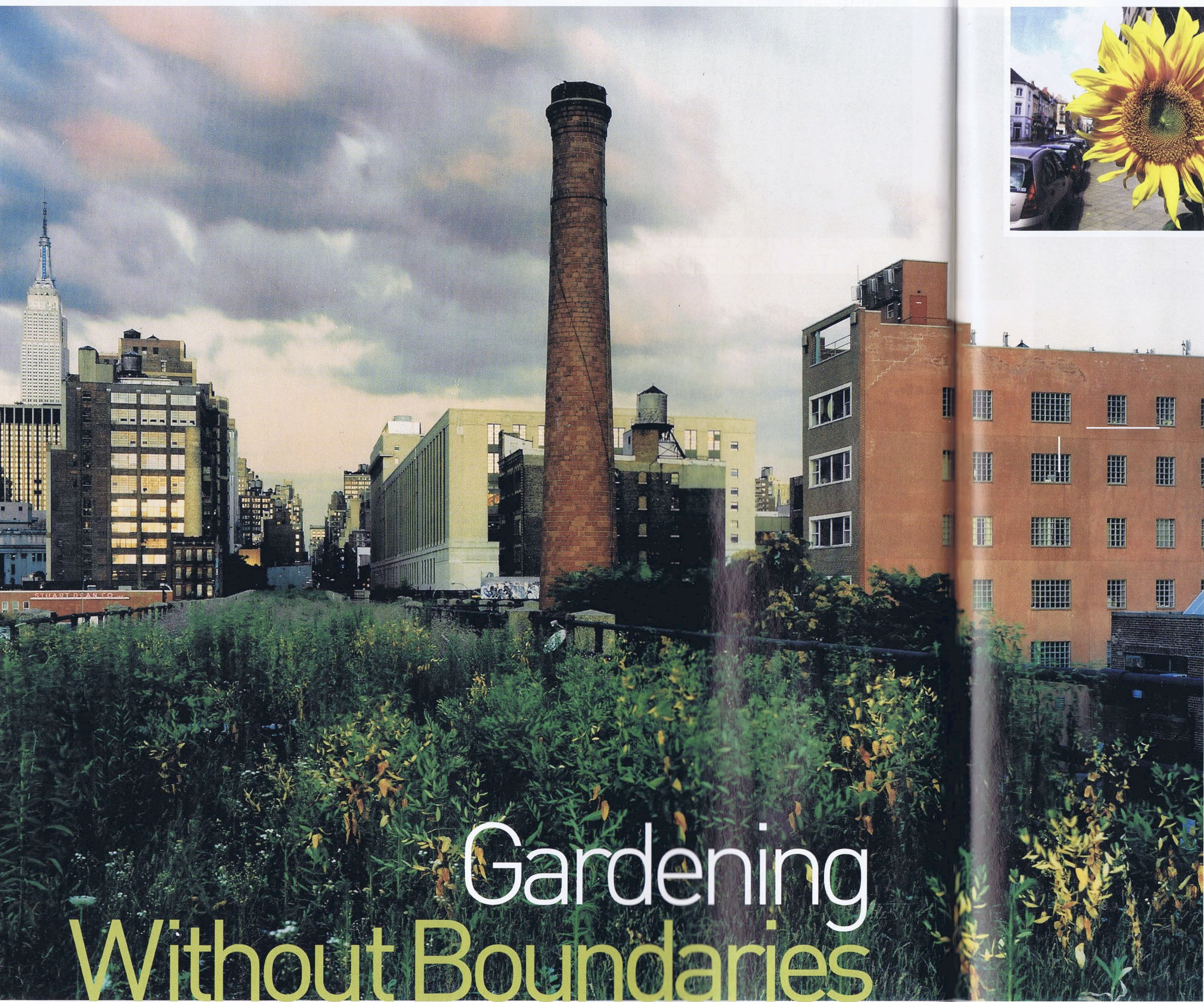
€1,000



Hot Seat

Creating light and shade in an ultra-modern retreat





Gardening Without Boundaries

FOR OVER FOUR YEARS, **RICHARD REYNOLDS** HAS BEEN COVERTLY SCATTERING SEEDS THROUGHOUT A VARIETY OF PUBLIC SPACES, BRINGING NATURAL BEAUTY BACK TO OTHERWISE NEGLECTED AREAS. HE IS ONE OF A WORLDWIDE WEB OF 'GUERRILLA GARDENERS', THOSE WHO ARE FIGHTING A GLOBAL WAR AGAINST SCARCITY OF LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE AND APATHY. THIS IS HIS REPORT FROM THE FRONTLINE.

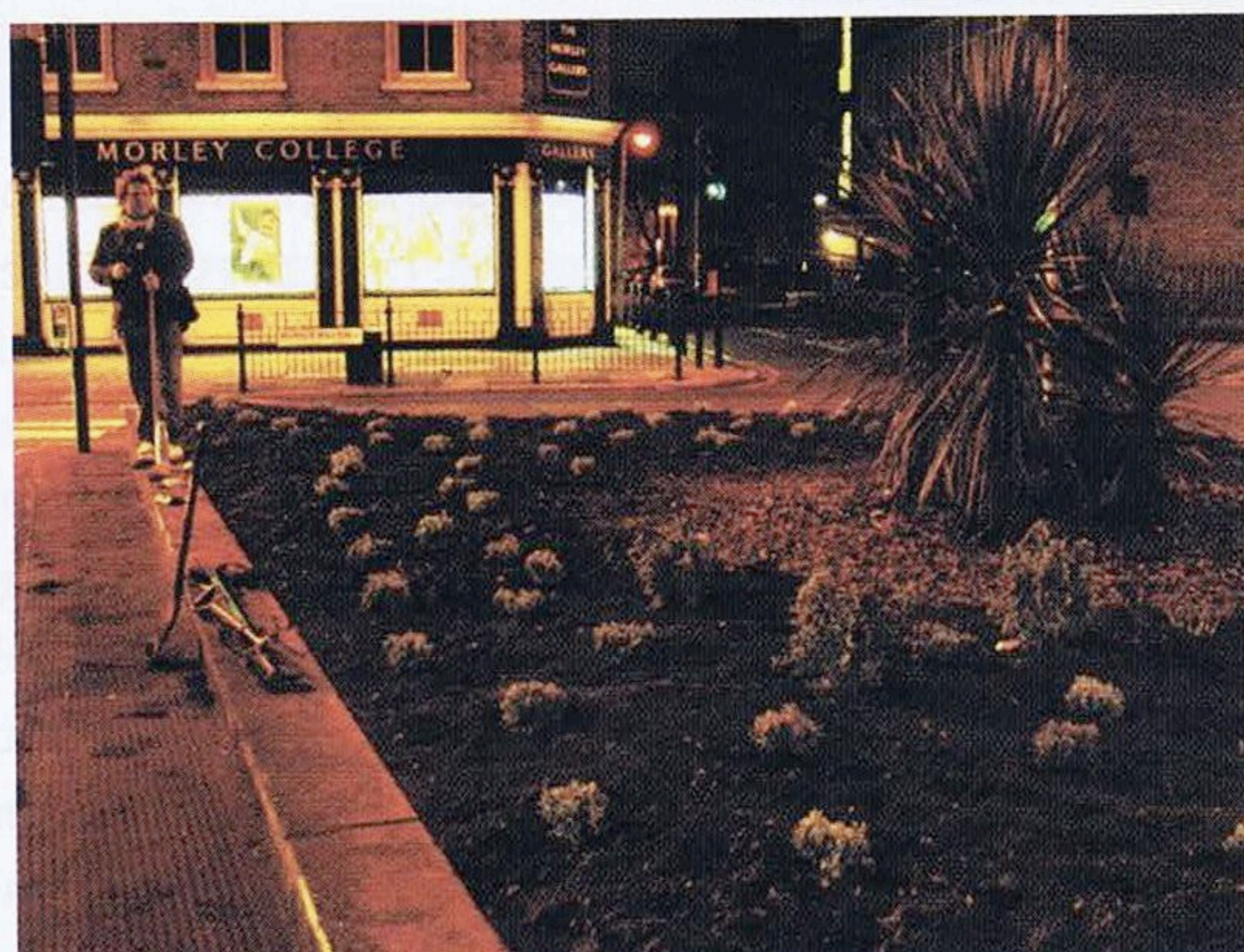
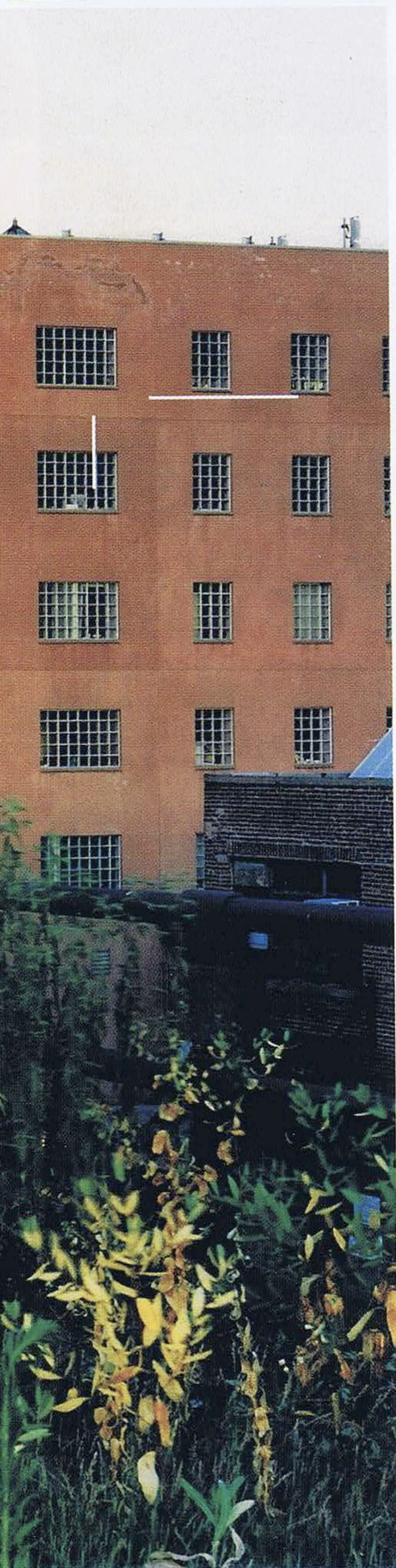


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Derelict elevated railway line along the far west side of Manhattan; Guerrilla Gardening in action in Brussels; red tulips and lavender abounds at Richard's dig in London's Westminster Bridge Road and (inset), how it looked two years earlier





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I am a guerrilla gardener.

No, not a hairy creature with a fierce trowel; I said guerrilla, not gorilla. A guerrilla because I cultivate land that is not mine and without permission.

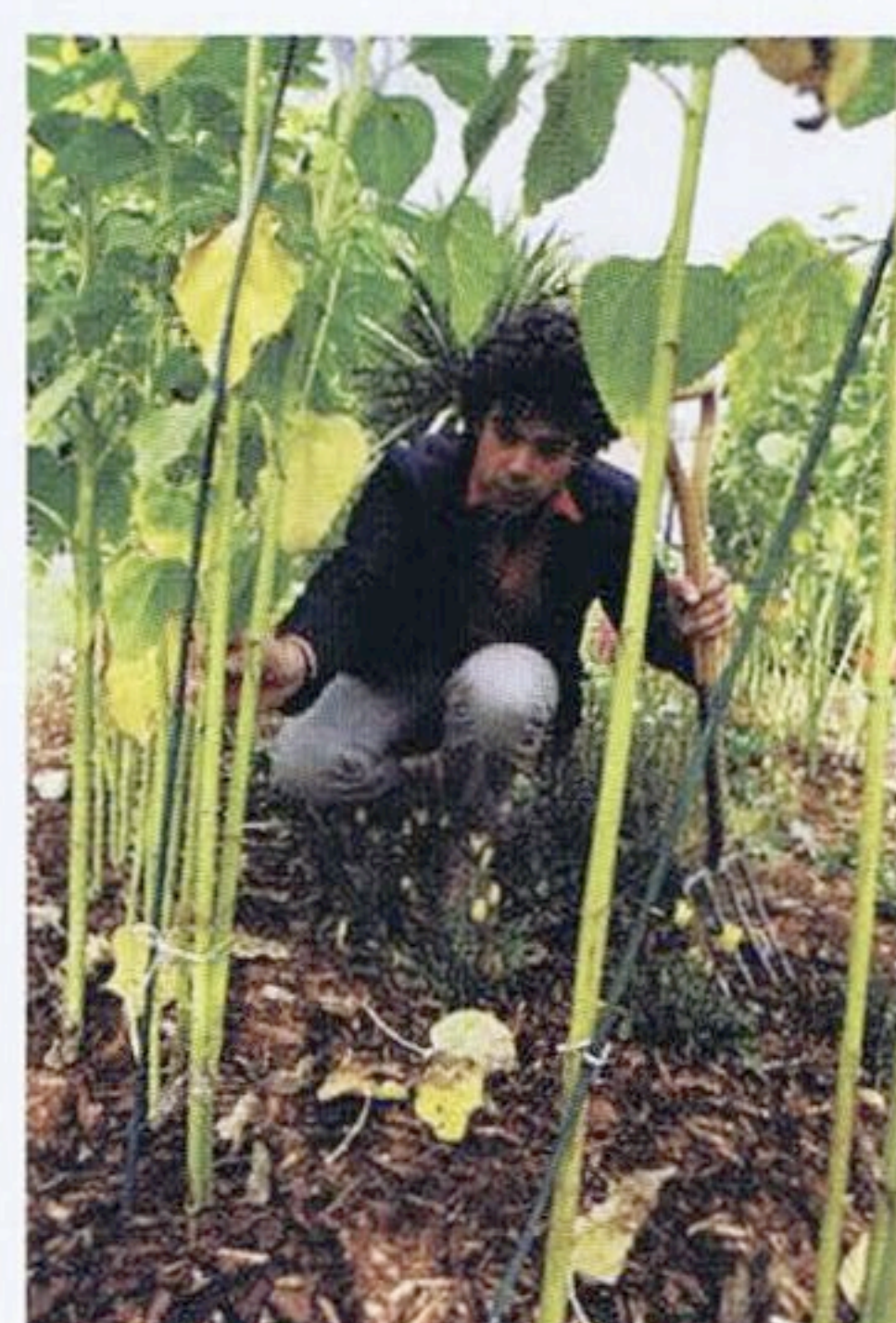
"It's an outrage," I hear you cry, "why doesn't he make do with his own garden?" "He should ask first, what's the point of gardening as a criminal?" "That's just bonkers." Hang on. Calm down. I'm going to explain what this guerrilla gardening is all about... and in doing so hopefully also persuade you to leap over the garden fence and join me on the horticultural frontline.

I assume, given the subject of this magazine, that you enjoy gardening. We're the same, you see. I've always enjoyed gardening. I grew up in North Devon and my family had a garden that was far too big for my parents to look after themselves. As soon as we could crawl they encouraged their four children to get stuck in and get grubby. I loved it. The itch to garden is what drives us to 'go guerrilla'.

Four years ago, at 27-years-old, for the first time in my life, I had no garden – not even a windowsill with boxes to tend. And yet all around me was land looking for love. It was not politics, not a grand art project, no eco-warrior mission, just the hunger for plain and simple gardening that got me out there. I had no plan beyond the picture in my head of sweet smelling flowers cascading down towards the road in place of the depressing tangle of overgrown shrubs, ground-elder and litter.



ABOVE: Guerrilla Gardening in action in LA; Luc by his pavement in Montreal
LEFT: Tom by some sunflowers (not in bloom) in Amsterdam
BELOW: Richard at work; guerrillas getting busy at St. George's Circus in London



Every gardener has a battle of sorts in the garden, against the elements, against pests and diseases and against voracious plants. The guerrilla has a few additional enemies to contend with. My fight is against the neglect of the public landscape. That's enemy number one. This battle is one plot of land at a time. I say, let's fight against the filth with forks and flowers and turn a honey pot for litter lobbers into one for bumblebees. And thousands around the world agree.

A guerrilla who goes by the name of Tampoopoo is active in Dublin. He started by tending the tree pit near his house with Nigella, Digitalis, Crocosmia and Erysimum. But as is so often the way with guerrillas, success bred ambition and Tampoopoo saw potential in the landscape further from home. He wrote to me with reports of digging on Shirling's Walk, an old linear park where there is now a light tramline. In went 150 bluebell bulbs and daffodils. More recently he added little chestnut seedlings and hundreds of sunflower seeds. (Sadly, not everything survives on the frontline. The sunflowers only made it to half their height before being slashed down by a municipal strimmer. But the enthusiastic guerrilla gardener takes this on the chin and ploughs on with more planting).

I have heard from a doctor in Shetland who guerrilla gardens around her surgery, a postman in Amsterdam who sows seeds as he does his delivery, a team of Belgium designers who plant sunflowers around Brussels and from Luc in Montreal (pictured above left), who is a municipal gardener by day but continues as a guerrilla during his spare time. I visited him last summer to see his victorious garden, an illicit blazing border along the back of a long suburban pavement. It's beautiful, really astonishing actually, and he has subsequently got permission, won awards and even taken part-time employment from a local business because of his public display.

You don't need to be living in a grotty urban jungle to see the opportunity for guerrilla gardening. This week I heard from a new troop who have been cultivating a place I thought was manicured to perfection: Hollywood. In a median strip just off Sunset Boulevard, our man (who goes by the name of Mr. Stamen) assembled a late night force of twenty-one glamorous Californians (pictured above). With some dressed in bright orange jump suits as disguise, and with cup cakes and hot chocolate as sustenance, they set about digging up the weedy, dry, tufty ground and planted Plumbago, Lantana, Agave and Nasturtium.

It wasn't just the visual improvement that so delighted Mr. Stamen, but the reaction from passers-by. He wrote: "The past few days when I've been watering I've gotten such an amazing response of gratitude from people. Strangers stopping me saying what I'm doing is great. I



“LET’S FIGHT AGAINST THE FILTH WITH FORKS AND FLOWERS AND TURN A HONEY POT FOR LITTER LOBBERS INTO ONE FOR HONEYBEES”

ABOVE:
A wildflower meadow
sown illicitly by Brita
1198 and friends
blooms on the island
by a west London
dual-carriageway

think this event may be life changing.”

Plenty of guerrilla gardeners have their own private garden already. They just can’t resist expanding their responsibilities into public space, the tatty verge, the shabby tree pit and the round-a-bout at the end of the road and beyond becomes their territory too. If you think of your garden as an extra room of your house, think of a street-side guerrilla garden as an extra wing, a potential public mansion open daily and to be treasured.

As for asking the landowner before you garden? I’m not against it – I just know it’s likely to be counter-productive if your targets are scraps of ‘orphaned’ land. They don’t want to take responsibility for our health and safety and they don’t want to have to tidy up the failed dream of a horticultural idealist. This land is out of mind for them and they’d prefer it stayed that way.

I see most authorities turning a supportive blind eye to guerrilla gardening, and in my area the horticultural chief has told the media he has “no stance”. For four years I have been guerrilla gardening big locations in central London without any trouble from the councils. It’s good news. I really don’t want them to garden there because I want to do it myself.

I’ve only ever had one unpleasant run-in with the police (they caught me on a traffic island in London’s Elephant & Castle during a late-night weeding session and insisted I stopped my “criminal damage”). All previous and subsequent encounters with the police

have been brief, routine and, actually, quite encouraging – it’s nice to have some cheery support while out gardening in public, even if it is from rather bemused constables. Only this week, while out watering a patch police had previously threatened to arrest me for weeding, I was cheerfully beeped at and waved from police in their passing panda car.

Don’t fear that once you begin guerrilla gardening you are committed to a life of crime. When the time is right we do go straight. Today in one of my roadside gardens I am no longer a guerrilla – after three years of cultivating the land I sought permission to continue and (after a bit of argy-bargy) was granted it. When I asked Southwark Council if they would have agreed to my action before I began gardening, they said, “absolutely not”.

That’s because it is easier for permission to be granted when a guerrilla garden is confidently blooming and the local people are on side than it is to a volunteer’s promises. In fact, it’s difficult for them to say “no”! **GD**

If you’re interested in finding out more, visit Richard’s website www.guerrillagardening.org. His new book, *On Guerrilla Gardening*, published by Bloomsbury, is available from good bookshops nationwide.

