

# GOING WILD FOR URBAN GUERRILLAS

With London as their classroom, flower lovers get streetwise thanks to city gardening

**W**HAT better place to start a practical day on Urban Gardening, organised by The School of Life, than at the headquarters of our country's leading guerrilla gardener?

Richard Reynolds's 10th-floor eyrie is within a seedbomb's throw of the Elephant & Castle Tube, and after we – a group of 20 – have marvelled at what he has shoehorned into the raised bed outside his tower block – a lilac from a supporter in New Hampshire, Japanese anemones from his mother, a rampant passionflower grown from a cutting, even two gunneras sent over from Herne Hill – we set out to pavement pimp. As Reynolds calls it.

And by pimping, we learn which plants will thrive in our own gardens. He explains that the plants he uses to brighten London's landscape have to tolerate traffic fumes, dry shade, neglect and being stepped on. Forget the RHS's Award of Garden Merit for outstanding plants, these have the AGGM – the Award of Guerrilla Gardening Merit.

Prime example is a nearby traffic island, where a huge plane tree looms over a narrow bed that Reynolds planted last year, and which has never been watered, aside from an initial drenching; he points out that an occasional soaking is far better than frequent trickling.

"Many London gardens have an overhanging tree," he says, "yet despite the dry shade, what's growing here is thriving." To a jolly border of sedums, foxgloves, snapdragons, which in the warm urban fug grow like a shrub, and Vinca minor, which is a vandal if let loose but in a limited space is welcome, we add a tray of perennial wallflower Bowles' Mauve.

"It's hardly ever out of flower, is super-tolerant, and is useful to guerrilla gardeners because it always has leaves, so people don't think it's dead and clear it away." We move on to a strip of soil

Pattie Barron



by the underpass steps, transformed with plants in shades of mauve: lilac and purple aubretia, trailing blue campanula, more mauve wallflower. Last year there was lollo rosso, too.

Reynolds chose the plants because he says blues and purples attract bees, and he's keen to encourage wildlife into town, but the lesson we learn is that the most ordinary plants can create the most extraordinary displays.

Our co-leader, gardening journalist Lila Das Gupta, produces a plastic bag with damp kitchen paper and shows us how to take cuttings because we all want to reproduce the scheme in our

**Many London gardens have an overhanging tree, yet despite the dry shade what's growing here is thriving**

own gardens. Onwards to St George's Circus, where Reynolds audaciously planted a drought-loving Med garden – no other plants would survive the wind tunnel and diesel fumes, he says – of phormium, Portuguese laurels, lavender, pittosporum and a bottle-brush reject from the Chelsea Flower Show to accompany the lone pair of council-planted cordylines.

After a picnic lunch in the grounds of the Imperial War Museum, we retire to a mature plane tree outside and throw the contents of a giant bag of compost, which Reynolds has pulled from his seemingly bottomless trolley, around the square of the bare planting pocket, along with urban stalwarts scarlet verberna, blue bacopa, African marigolds and golden thyme.

We dig over the soil, then Reynolds completes the job by sprinkling wildflower seeds on bare spaces – like



**Far left:** plant kit is stashed in a giant trolley so Reynolds can plant and water on the hoof

**Left:** outside the Imperial War Museum, Reynolds shows how to "pimp" a pavement



**Above:** plants on a traffic island get a thorough soaking from a water bottle

Tinkerbell dispensing fairy dust. Back at The School of Life in Bloomsbury, Das Gupta, who has her own allotment, gives us a potted education in what edibles we can grow in pots – from radishes to curly kale, which she says

will grow right through winter – and we get our hands dirty, potting up our cuttings, sowing seeds and planting up seedlings, happy as pigs in muck.

Urban gardening, we decide, doesn't get any better than this.

## DON'T MISS

Keep up-to-date with the latest gardening news by following Pattie Barron's blog at [homesandproperty.co.uk/blogs](http://homesandproperty.co.uk/blogs)



## Gardening problems?

Email our RHS expert at: [gardenproblems@standard.co.uk](mailto:gardenproblems@standard.co.uk)

**The next Urban Gardening day will be held on Saturday, September 18 and will be led by Richard Reynolds; cost, to include picnic lunch and organic supper, £110. Bookings will be taken from July at [theschooloflife.com](http://theschooloflife.com)**

**For more on pavement pimping, visit [pimpyourpavement.com](http://pimpyourpavement.com)**