

HOTLINE

THE VIRGIN TRAINS MAGAZINE APRIL 2010



300+
THINGS TO DO
THIS MONTH
ON OUR NETWORK

FORGET FLYING

DISCOVER FIRST CLASS BRITAIN

YUMMY BRUMMIES

BIRMINGHAM GOES GASTRO

REGINALD D HUNTER

ON WHY HE LOVES THE NORTH

GET GREEN FINGERS WITH
KIM WILDE, CERY'S MATTHEWS
AND THE GUERRILLA GARDENERS



FLOWER POWER

Guerilla gardening is taking root in our cities. Deborah Hatch meets the graffiti-inspired gardeners behind this latest urban revolution

IF YOU HAPPEN TO NOTICE a cheery crop of sunflowers sprouting from an unexpected spot in your city over the next few months, they may well be the handiwork of a secret band of environmental activists. These days, graffiti artists aren't the only ones reclaiming the streets with subversive creativity; seed-spraying outlaws are pimping pavements and enlivening disused spaces from Elephant and Castle in south London to Townhead in central Glasgow.

In UK cities and around the world, 'guerrilla gardeners' are making their mark on the urban landscape, usually under the cover of darkness. Like graffiti, gardening without permission in public spaces is not strictly legal, but police often turn a blind eye and local residents have been known to help out with buckets of water.

It all started in London in 2004 with Richard Reynolds, whose blog documenting his one-man campaign to brighten up a neglected south

London council block inspired nature-lovers from Montreal to Manchester to beautify their neighbourhoods, plant vegetable patches and make a positive statement about land misuse.

But who are these green-fingered guerrillas? Are they as clandestine as their graffiti counterparts? Reynolds, who works as an advertising planner, insists the majority are respectable members of society. 'The youngish inner-city types are often professional people with day jobs who simply don't have a garden,' he says. 'They like the fun of being a bit mischievous and the social side of it – gardening is a fantastic conversation starter.'

Cultivating secret gardens, it seems, is not just the preserve of eco-warriors and hessian-wearing hippies, as UK-based Canadian designer Vanessa Harden is keen to point out. 'I do my guerilla gardening at night after work,' she explains. 'And I got to thinking, why not design

something chic to carry my tools around? I took inspiration from spy gadgets and now my tools are hidden away in secret pouches inside fashionable oversized bags, purses and briefcases.'

Even with a trendy tool bag, it's hard to hot-foot it from the law with a shovel and seed tray. To make life slightly easier, Glasgow-based product designer and guerrilla gardener Darren Wilson invented the Seedbom – a light, pocket-sized bundle of seeds designed to be hurled into a suitable patch of soil. 'Seedboms are friendly grenades for gardeners,' he explains. 'They can be launched into any space that's hard to get to – like fenced areas, derelict land and railway embankments.'

With over 3,000 enthusiasts poised to plant sunflowers for National Guerrilla Gardening Day on 1 May, our urban spaces are sure to look a lot more cheerful this summer. *¡Viva la revolución!*

guerrillagardening.org

