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### Green on grey

There is a worldwide movement that puts a green patch in concrete jungles. Let's extend these bits of paradise, writes NANDINI HEBBAR



#### Smell of the soil Let's make it an earthy place

It is undertaken on a war footing. People storm an empty field of land, bomb it with seed balls and wait for to rain. Before long, a verdant spot springs forth from the nothingness. The sweet spoils of war!

The passion of reclaiming public or unused urban space for nature stirs many a heart across the globe. While some work solo, others are provoked into ploughing an eyesore plot into a little patch of paradise.

Although most of these do-gooders do not see anything mildly political in their actions, others have enlisted in a loosely-organised global group called the Guerrilla Gardeners (GG), under UK-based Richard Reynolds, author of the acclaimed book on Guerrilla Gardening.

Richard started cultivating outside a neglected council block in Elephant and Castle and started blogging about it in October 2004 at [www.guerrillagardening.org](http://www.guerrillagardening.org) "The idea came to me as a solution to my lack of a garden, my frustration with the neglect around me in central London and the fun that could be had creating gardens in this way." He still blogs at the same site, but it now includes a community index, tips and newspaper articles.

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### In the beginning

He then discovered that the origins of his idea lay in the community garden movement of New York in the 1970s. The first to use the term "Guerrilla Gardening," although the idea itself had long been in vogue, were Liz Christey and her green guerrilla group who "squatted" a derelict piece of land in the Houston area of New York. Since then, the organised movement has spread all over the world and taken on many forms.

A high-profile instance of guerrilla gardening took place in May 1996 when troopers, members of a group called Land is Ours, occupied 13 acres of disused land belonging to the Guinness Company on the banks of the Thames in south London and set up a community called 'Pure Genius' named after the company's advertising slogan.

### Ready to recruit

In India, an offshoot of Guerrilla Gardeners is just taking root. Gopalakrishnan Mahend, who initiated the division in Bangalore, explains how guerrilla gardening works in the country, "Nobody minds if you cultivate public space in India," he says, "because nobody cares for it." Although the movement is still in a nascent stage in India, Guerrilla Gardeners are ready to recruit in Delhi, Mumbai, Coimbatore and Chennai.

However, the idea is still not a revolutionary one in the country. Priya Nayak, an M.Sc. student says she acted on the thought of planting trees in public spaces after being inspired by a cartoon show in 1997. With a bunch of other middle-schoolers, she planted saplings around her hometown, Mangalore.

"People were amused," she recalls. "They thought we were just a bunch of kids who came up with something new to play. We were forced to disband."

Little did she know that play would actually become the keyword in creating environmental awareness among yuppies. Borrowing from Masanobu Fukuoka's revival of seedball cultivation, the Bio-diversity Council of India (BCIL) promotes seeding of urban minds by making them dirty their hands to prepare seed balls – marble-sized balls of compost, mud and water that encase a tiny seed. Costing next to nothing and taking 15 seconds to make, the seedballs can be dried and stored for posterity to be scattered at will.

Shailja Avasti, a copy-writer, who participated at a World Environment Day programme where she made the seed balls says: "That I was not worrying about global warming, but instead engaging in something positive made me really happy."

"Therein lies its promise," says Radha Easwar, trustee BCIL, "it makes urbanites engage with the environment. People need not necessarily cultivate whole plots of land: a little flowering pot or a kitchen garden will do. It's the thought that counts."

Forks and flowers, anyone?

### PLANT A PLANT

Locate an empty spot to be cultivated – if you don't find a patch of ground, get innovative – unused kitchen sinks and old toilet pots are popular choices.

Seeds are widely available. Choose flowering plants or vegetables, so you can grow your own organic food and reduce your food miles.

You can also join the global movement by enrolling yourself at <http://www.guerrillagardening.com> or <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=91708332392> &ref=nf .

To order Do-it-Yourself seedball kits or to organise a seedball making event, contact Varun: +91 98868 93598 or [varun@ecobcil.com](mailto:varun@ecobcil.com)

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