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## GUERRILLA GARDENING

Richard Reynolds is probably the most rebellious gardener you'll meet. He talks about growing your own food at uni

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## RICHARD REYNOLDS

Incensed at the price of herbs and vegetables? Fancy harnessing your inner rebel and growing your own ingredients? Richard Reynolds, aka the guerilla gardener, tells The Stu how he was inspired to turn London into his own leafy urban wonderland.

About ten minutes away from my house in South London, along an unexceptional quiet road called Denmark Hill, the uniform grey is interrupted, suddenly and regally by tall stalks of sunflowers dividing the carriage ways. It's an unusual sight in an otherwise concrete clad landscape, but these flowers haven't been planted as part of a government incentive, nor are they a product of Cameron's 'Big Society'. These flowers have in fact been planted by Richard Reynolds, a man better known as 'the guerrilla gardener'.

Reynolds, an advertising executive by day, happened upon guerilla gardening almost by chance after developing a love of gardening as a youngster, guided by his grandmother. "I wanted to garden but didn't have anywhere to do it," he explains "I didn't want to be forced to get on a bike and ride an hour into the suburbs every day to grow in an allotment." Instead, he appropriated an overgrown, abandoned patch of land that was 'literally on the doorstep' and began to grow on it, testing out what would grow amongst the traffic and pavements.

It was an activity he took around the borough he lived in, creating gardens out of wasteland and garnering both support and suspicion from his local community. The idea that planting sunflowers on a roadside could be illegal may sound ridiculous, but it's a sad truth. Much of the guerilla gardening that is taking place across the country is done so at night to avoid authorities, although nowadays, admits Reynolds, mostly he is met by grudging tolerance. It was only after he registered the domain name guerrillagardening.org that he realised he had inadvertently become part of a far more wide-spread project, not only in his community, but across the world. "It was then I saw that guerilla gardening had been already been established and in existence for hundreds of years" Since then, Reynolds has become something of a beacon for the art of reusing abandoned land in the city. His website shows people from across the world who have been inspired to join the cause and beautify their local areas, from a surprising range of ages and origins.

Perhaps it's this inclusiveness within guerilla gardening that is making it increasingly popular. There isn't a limit on who can participate; friends, neighbours and

strangers young and old have all clubbed together to make their own gardening clubs. It was something of a surprising development for Reynolds. Guerilla gardening was, he tells me, accidentally philanthropic. It was also accidentally political and unsurprisingly so. In the course of his gardening, Reynolds has examined where money has been wasted both in his local council and others around London, and is perhaps understandably peeved at the levels of bureaucracy he has encountered by simply planting flowers on neglected land. "I enjoy gardening and that was the primary motivation. However, I have found myself becoming more politically motivated" He now works on community projects with the council, encouraging people to participate in the upkeep of their local areas.

"I didn't start out gardening for any political reason," he is quick to point out, "but it has increasingly made me question authority and the thinking behind some of the decisions being made in local government."

So apart from political awakening, what can gardening, a pass time usually associated with middle classes and the middle-aged, have to offer students in the UK? "Getting their hands dirty" laughs Richard. "It's a great way to de-stress, and meet people. And you can grow almost anything, including your own vegetables" He is even cautiously optimistic about the impact of the volatile economic market will have on participation in community projects. Although not in support of some of the spending reviews taking place, he believes that some of the greatest inspiration can come from austere times:

"The vacuum caused by cuts can lead to a freedom of creativity. Its not all doom and gloom, nor the end of creativity." And with that kind of desperately needed positivity, what's to stop you from grabbing your nearest trowel and a pack of seeds and growing your own salad this month?

On Guerrilla Gardening - A Handbook For Gardening Without Boundaries by Richard Reynolds is available now. Be sure to share any stories or photos of your guerilla experiments with us. We're not condoning anything that breaks the law though!

Before you get started, be wary of the season. Land that looks neglected and sparse in winter may just be harbouring seeds for next spring, so be sure you're not planting on someone else's plot.

There's something of a 'trial and error' involved in guerilla gardening, that will require a certain degree of learning as you go. Plant away and see what happens.

You'd be surprised how many plots are sitting right on your doorstep. One nearby will be easy to both access and maintain.

Guerilla gardening is best done as a solo project with help from just a few friends, says Reynolds. Don't get bogged down in bureaucracy - just get up and go.

It is often the case that ground that is fertile enough to grow weeds will often also be able to accommodate some other plants.