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“Here were people growing organic food in the most dangerous part of the city. It's exactly what we need”

DARRYL HANNAH ON GUERRILLA GARDENERS IN LA



**FLOWER POWER** | He thinks tulips can make Londoners a nicer bunch



DAVID PARRY

## INTERVIEW | 'GUERRILLA GARDENER'

# Rebel in a garden

Jess Holland meets the Banksy of gardening - the man the police love to hate

RICHARD REYNOLDS is darting among flowering shrubs, red and purple tulips and Californian poppies on a patch of land sandwiched between three busy roads near his Elephant and Castle flat.

Undeterred by the drizzle, he scoops handfuls of rubbish and dead leaves, and it's not long before a middle-aged passer-by stops. "Thanks for what you're doing," he says. "It looks wonderful."

The fertile plot of land isn't Reynolds' garden, or a community patch, and his tending is actually illegal, despite the support of locals.

Reynolds is one of a growing army of "guerrilla gardeners" - outlaws living in high-rise flats - who emerge at night and, like the graffiti artist Banksy, use the city's landscape to express themselves. This patch is an "orphaned"

tract straddling Lambeth and Southwark, neglected for years until a night-time raid with a gang of friends, a sack of compost and a load of seedlings and bulbs. Two years on and the site's a riot of green.

"Gardens are really important. Flowers are important," Reynolds says later over a cup of tea. The 30-year-old freelance ad man began by tidying the planters outside his flat simply because he didn't have any garden of his own. But as he met other guerrilla gardeners through his website ([www.guerrillagardening.org](http://www.guerrillagardening.org)) he realised the benefits went further than alleviating itchy fingers.

Green spaces in London, he says, are constantly threatened by development, which impacts on biodiversity, flood risk, and urban heat levels. And simply making the area

prettier can have a positive impact on crime and community spirit. "What I'm doing isn't going to stop global warming," he admits, "but it's part of being environmentally aware." Reynolds' book explains - the hobby and urges others to follow.

"You've got population and demand for land going up," he says, "so you have to make use of what's available."

For people with no private land, that means reclaiming tatty roadside and traffic islands. If you buy a copy of the book, you'll get a free pack of sunflower seeds to start you off - they're hardy enough

that even the laziest city kid should be able to make them grow in a few inches of soil.

Reynolds says the vast majority of sites he's cultivated have been left to flourish, but guerrilla gardening has its risks. Last

weekend 16 policeman arrived midway through a mission, threatening to arrest him for criminal damage.

"They were so heavy handed," he says. "We went home, waited half an hour, and went back and finished

the job. I don't want to be a martyr, but I believe common sense should prevail."

**On Guerrilla Gardening, Bloomsbury, £14.99**

