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Planting vegetables in Parliament Square, May Day 2000. London, UK

Guerrilla Gardening

“Armed with trowels, seeds, and vision, the idea is to garden everywhere. Anywhere.”

– Primal Seeds

Capitalism is a system that separates everything from everything else. Take food, for example. What was the last thing you ate? Where was it grown? How far did it have to travel to get to you? How many lorries, planes, boats were required, and how much oil used? How much did you pay for it, and how much did those who grew and picked it get? How many chemicals were used to grow and package it? How much control did you have over how the food that passed your lips was produced?

There is a way out of this ignorance and dependence – growing our own food. Learning to produce our own food is a

threat to capitalism as it begins to break us free of the cycle of supply and demand, liberating us from the role of passive consumer, remote from real decisions, alienated from nature.

To grow food we need land, yet most of us have none. Capitalism's first act is often the privatization of common, or public, land, whether we are talking about the enclosures of seventeenth century England or the Mexican Government's repeal of Article 27, the law which until 1992 guaranteed common ownership.

But whether you're in the countryside or the city, there are always little gaps, holes, places that can be transformed into small oases providing food for you and your neighbours. This is where guerrilla gardening comes in.

Guerrilla gardening can take many forms, and is practiced all over the world – from the hundreds of community gardens on vacant lots in New York, to the squats on decontaminated GMO test sites in Britain and Germany; from the London May Day 2000 action to the landless Thai and Filipino peasants who plant vegetables on squatted golf courses; from the neighbourhood in San Francisco who used broken parking meters as planters, to the IMF/World Bank protesters in Washington DC, who developed a tree planting project which involved going door to door with saplings and a flyer linking deforestation with Bank policies, and offering to plant trees outside people's houses if they agreed to care for it.

And if any one tells you that growing our own food is not 'realistic' for large cities, tell them about Havana, the Cuban city of 2.2 million people which has over 1,000 public gardens,

employing 30,000 people producing 70 per cent of the city's fresh fruit and vegetables. It's also worth remembering that a lot of what we call weeds – nettles, dandelions, chickweed, nuts, and berries – provide wonderful food for free and require little effort, and no need for clandestinity.

How to Guerrilla Garden:

1) Do some reconnaissance

First find your ideal site. It could be a railway embankment, golf course, roof top, car park, vacant lot, quiet corner of a local park, crack in the pavement – the choice is endless. Consider ease of access, contamination, and your impact on the surrounding community.

2) Arm yourself

Growing things is not as difficult as you think. It's also vital for biodiversity. Seventy-five per cent of crop plant varieties went extinct in the 20th century. Join a seed bank, save, swap and

plant non-commercial varieties. A wide variety of food can be grown with a minimum of tools or external energy inputs. All you need to start is a trowel, some seeds, a small bag of compost, some water, and ingenuity.

3) Break ground

Best to do it at night or without drawing too much attention to yourself. Plant your seeds, make sure they will get some light, and give them a good water. Weeds can be left alone except where they threaten to engulf your crop, as they provide initial camouflage for your activities.

4) Enjoy the harvest

After several months of tending, your garden will be ready for harvest. Why not invite friends and neighbours to share your first home grown meal? You can turn it into an event, share your stories of guerrilla gardening exploits, show them before and after photographs, and eventually turn the conversation

to abolishing capitalism. You never know, the taste of locally grown fresh food might convince them to join the guerrillas!

“Humanity is born free but everywhere is in supermarket chains buying 14.7 cm long carrots stripped of dirt, geography, effort, labour stripped of content, context, joy and flavour buying 14.7 cm long carrots stripped of carrothood”.

– Steve Hancock, 'all power to the allotments', *In Between Poems*, Pig and Ink books, 2000

Resources:

- » **Primal Seeds:** <http://primalseeds.nologic.org/>
- » **UK seedbank:** www.hdra.org.uk