



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

I've always believed that the best environmental work is done by individuals. Admittedly, we need governments and environmental groups to smooth the way and provide money, at least some of the time, but all their posturing, conferences and reports can't match the sheer determination of passionate individuals on the front line. The latest example is an army of self-styled 'guerrilla gardeners', whose aim is simply the "illicit cultivation of someone else's land." They work under cover of darkness, armed with pitchforks, trowels and bags of seeds, and transform grim, grey urban wastelands into colourful, fragrant horticultural havens. It's a brilliant idea.

Guerrilla gardening has its roots in 1970s New York, and has since inspired urban dwellers across the world to defy the authorities and care for neglected public places.

But it now seems to be gathering momentum faster than ever before.

Countless 'troops' have signed up to a website (www.guerrillagardening.org) where they are given an identification number and can report details



A roadside verge in bloom, thanks to the GGs

They work under cover of darkness, transforming grim, grey urban wastelands into fragrant havens.

of their digs and seed-bombing raids. GG (Guerrilla Gardener) 830 Tony releases handfuls of Welsh poppy seeds while driving along the M60, while GG 2585 Angela is tackling neglected patches of public land in Milan. And, far away in Brisbane, GG 2821 Jerry is conducting random acts of tree-planting. Rather predictably, guerrilla gardening is a crime in Britain – digging up land you don't own is tantamount to committing criminal damage. But the real crime is the way most local authorities show a complete lack of interest in neglected patches of urban land – unless they are big enough to sell to developers, of course. With a little manual labour and a few native plants, roadside verges, roundabouts, public parks and even car parks can easily be transformed to make life happier and greener. No wonder so many otherwise law-abiding citizens are taking matters into their own hands. As one GG said, when being ticked off by the police, resistance is fertile.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, author and tv presenter.