

## Guerrilla Gardening guidelines and application recommendations

### **Practice observed:**

Guerrilla gardening is the act of gardening on land that the gardener does not have legal rights to garden on. Guerrilla gardening is generally done as a form of civic activism, passive rebellion, or self expression.

### **Observations:**

Guerrilla gardening can range from small digs, such as filling a pothole with dirt and flowers, to large scale digs that convert neglected vacant lots into vegetable gardens. Although it is generally illegal, all guerrilla gardens, big or small, are intended to be done respectfully and in a way that enhances the land and surrounding community. Generating a guerrilla garden often requires coordination from a number of people in order to be effective. The procedure of executing proper a guerrilla garden is generally as follows:

- identify site
- plan a mission
- gather supplies
- dig
- upkeep

The guidelines in this document are based on the assumption that an effective guerrilla garden follows these steps, and thus the guidelines expand on these steps. Many of the guidelines below can be expanded on by standard gardening practices, so the below focuses on the unique needs of a guerrilla garden.

### **Guerrilla gardening guidelines:**

1. Identify a site that meets the following:
  - a. It is important that plants can actually survive where they are planted. A guerrilla garden is encouraged to be a method of self-expression, but should also be something that is sustainable. When identifying a site, considering the following questions about plant survivability.
    - i. will water runoff into this area?
    - ii. is the area's ground polluted?
    - iii. will vehicles or other types of traffic impeded a plant's survival?
  - b. Has vegetation ever been removed from this location in the past? Because guerrilla gardening takes place on land owned by someone else, it is difficult to be in control of how the land will change. However, a guerrilla garden should not be planted if any of the following are true:
    - i. the area is under construction and will likely change in the near future

- ii. the area is landscaped and is liable to have the plants removed
  - iii. guerrilla gardens have been added here in the past and have been removed
- c. How does the community feel about having a garden here? If neighbors or the surrounding community express that they do not wish for a garden to be added to a location, then their wishes should be respected. Guerrilla gardening is at the core about community and the people and they should be respected.
- 2. If the planned garden is of considerable size, a mission should be formalized. Aspects will vary depending on garden size, but generally these aspects should be considered
  - a. reach out to fellow gardeners for help
  - b. post in online forums
  - c. set a time for the dig
  - d. consider how many people will be involved
  - e. consider how much parking is available
  - f. consider if the area will have a camera for monitoring growth
  - g. consider if the area has wifi for plant communication?
- 3. Before creating a guerrilla garden, consider what supplies are needed, both standard gardening equipment as well as potential unique needs.
  - a. some standard gardening needs are:
    - i. soil
    - ii. fertilizer
    - iii. seeds/seedlings/plants
    - iv. shovels and trowels
    - v. a wheelbarrow
  - b. guerrilla gardening may also have unique needs, such as following
    - i. plant monitoring kit (either pre-made or DIY)
    - ii. flashlights for a night dig
  - c. Choose the appropriate type of plant for your location. The USDA has broken down United States into a “plant hardiness zone map” which can be used to decide what types of plants to grow. Plant types vary widely and precipitation can also affect plant effectiveness. Consult your local plant nursery for specific questions on types of plants. As plant choice is not unique to guerrilla gardening, these guidelines will not focus on specific plant choice recommendations.
- 4. Dig the garden. Remember that a guerrilla garden generally isn’t legal and affects people other than the gardeners. Consider the following when actually on the dig:
  - a. respect bystanders. You are potentially effecting their land or their community, and respect them accordingly.
  - b. respect the land. You are creating a garden to improve the conditions of the land, and thus the garden should be done tastefully .
  - c. do not plant illegal or hazardous plants. The action and location of the garden fall in legal gray areas, but the plants themselves should be legal and meant to

enhance the community. Do not plant marijuana where the law prohibits marijuana consumption.

- d. If the authorities show up, be respectful and cooperative. Explain exactly what you are doing (ie. creating a guerrilla garden) and why. If they request you remove the garden or leave the area, do as they say. Do not run from the police.
  - e. Do not use pesticides or chemicals. The goal is to enhance the area, not add chemicals to the ground
5. If you plant a guerrilla garden, you are obligated to help it survive.
- a. Do not plant a garden and then leave it on its own, or assume that someone else will upkeep the garden
  - b. Check up on plants regularly. It is understandably more difficult to constantly maintain a garden that is located remotely, but standard gardening upkeep should be performed on a guerrilla garden. The amount of upkeep will depend on time of year and weather patterns. However, generally speaking, adhere to the following for upkeep:
    - i. visit garden at least once a week
    - ii. water garden on every visit, unless they are succulents
    - iii. weed plants every two visits
    - iv. check soil ph level every two visits
    - v. check for infections and other plant ailments. Respond to these ailments as directed by local plant nursery
    - vi. if plants start yielding fruit, harvest when appropriate.
    - vii. Don't be angry if someone else is taking the fruit from the plants. Generating food for the community is part of the point of guerrilla gardening.

### **Application guidelines:**

Based on my observations made in guerrilla gardening, as well as these established guidelines, I have come up with the following concept that I believe would greatly enhance the experience of guerrilla gardening. My application proposal focuses mostly on guidelines 1 and 5, identifying a site and upkeeping a garden. Guidelines 2, 3, and 4 are relatively well documented and assisted on the internet. However, it is generally difficult to identify good sites for guerrilla gardens, and upkeeping gardens remotely can be tedious, especially when there are multiple gardens over a large amount of land.

To aid in identifying sites and maintaining existing gardens, I propose an application that aggregates data about guerrilla gardens and makes the data accessible through a geographical map. This application should serve as a publicly accessible application for sharing good garden locations, providing information about the feasibility of certain areas, and give status updates on the plants. Also, the application should provide useful information to new gardeners, such as the above gardening guidelines as well as links to other available

resources on the web. To connect the application to the gardens, the following should also be implemented:

1. plant monitoring kits. Many exist that can be bought off the shelf or made as a DIY project. These kits read the following information and transmit it either by twitter, email, or proprietary applications:
  - a. amount of sunlight
  - b. moisture level
  - c. temperature
  - d. fertilizer
2. public wifi. In order to collect the information provided by the plant monitoring kit, public wifi will probably need to be utilized to transmit the information.
3. accessible IP cameras. Many surveillance cameras can be publicly accessed. If a camera can be publicly accessed that overlooks a guerrilla garden, that camera can be used to monitor a garden's status remotely.

The application should include the following features:

1. geographic map
2. "heat map" feature to show which areas have a more conducive environment for a guerrilla garden
3. pins on the map to indicate current gardens. There should be 4 different types of pins to indicate a garden's current status
  - a. green- good condition
  - b. yellow- plant is okay, but has needs
  - c. red- plant is dying and needs immediate help
  - d. black- there is no garden here. Either it has been removed or there has never been a garden here
4. an in depth view of each garden should be provided when a pin is clicked on. This in depth view should have the following:
  - a. time since last watered
  - b. video monitor (if applicable)
  - c. photo of site
  - d. field for important notes about the site
5. an option to add a new location, this can be done without adding a plant and will exist on the map as a black pin until a garden has been added there. The new location options should include the following:
  - a. coordinates or address of the location so it can be added to the map
  - b. soil quality rating. What is the current quality of the soil and will it need to be replaced
  - c. accessibility rating. Is the site right on the road or hidden away. How easily can it be reached?
  - d. community rating. Is the area accepting of strangers, especially those changing the land
  - e. overall quality rating. Would you recommend a garden to go here?

- f. wifi in area check box
  - g. camera in area check box
  - h. upload photo
- 6. when a guerrilla garden has been planted, it needs to be added to the map. This feature should connect the garden to the map with the following criteria:
  - a. plant code: this is used to gather the signals from the plants
  - b. location: this be added to an existing location already on the map, or at a new location.
  - c. add a photo of the new garden
  - d. an option to request help from other potential guerrilla gardeners in the area. This option will let gardeners know that you don't live in the area and that it will be difficult to upkeep the garden without help.
  - e. wifi password: if there is wifi in the area, allow gardeners log in to the wifi
  - f. connect camera: if there is a local IP camera in the area, how can it be accessed?
- 7. access to guidelines. These guidelines should be made accessible as a resource to new gardeners
- 8. community resources. Other community forums such as guerrillagardening.org should be linked through the application.

The application should be accessible through the web both on desktop computers as well as on mobile devices. It should also be made accessible with older technology or inferior browsers such as Internet Explorer. It is more important that everyone has access to this application than it is for the application to be fancy.

To see a prototype application based on the above guidelines, use this link:

<http://jrussellhuffman.com/garden/>

Creating a guerrilla garden can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, but the inherent risk in the activity should never be forgotten. Use these guidelines as well as your own good judgement. These are just guidelines and every garden is different and every new garden opportunity should be considered carefully. Always remember, be safe, be respectful, and happy gardening.