The High Line in New York is a successful example of how, with the correct plant choice, an amazing result can be achieved in a once forgotten space

PLANT BOMBS

Landscape Designer Franchesa Watson gives the low-down on guerilla gardening

I recently took part in a garden open day and was most interested to see that a couple of gardens were 'guerilla gardens' – a garden that has been created outside of legal ownership.

Guerilla gardening has been around for quite a while and is gaining momentum around the world. Most guerilla gardeners plant to beautify their neighbourhood or get together to grow food – for example, the organised and successful Oranjezicht City Farm project. Then there are those who seek to provoke change through direct action, such as the activist Adam Purple (considered the godfather of the urban gardening movement) and his Garden of Eden in New York, which was demolished in 1986 under much controversy to make way for a new housing project.

But what about those of us who happily garden independently? Most of us have access to extra land in the form of our verges. What if we all planted out our verges for wildlife? Made ourselves a little more carbon neutral? Left to their own devices, our verges will, at most, get a rough cut once a year from the Council, but mostly they are just left alone. Some of us garden them anyway.

Planted with indigenous plants chosen for their food and shelter qualities – and arranged with a modicum of thought – verges can be very beautiful and can increase the resources available to wildlife in our cities and suburbs. Verges can act as corridors for the movement and sustenance of small animals, birds and insects – making a whole lot more space for nature in our lives.

You can start small, just a square metre at a time. If you plant at the right time of year and, with local plants, you won't need to water much and, once established, not at all. A few things may not survive but many will. You need good advice about your plant choice – basically the plants that would have been growing there anyway if it wasn't a suburb are best, as that's what the birds and insects would need.

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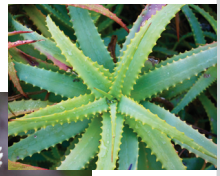
ADVICE **Plant small young plants** that are more vigorous and adaptable than those that have spent many seasons getting big in a container. Plant at the beginning of the rainy season.

Think biodiversity and plant a wide selection of plants, not just one or two types. You need things that flower and fruit at different times of the year so that there is food for wildlife all year round.

Include some indigenous grasses and plants that will grow into small or medium-sized shrubs, as well as a few ground covers.

Consider the street trees (hopefully fruiting ones). If the trees cast shade, you will need plants that like this.



Clockwise from top left *Choose a species that thrives in poor soil and low-water conditions in sun to semi-shade such as Pelargonium sp; Cotyledon orbiculata; Aloe sp; and Metalasia muricata*

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH: ADRIAAN LOUW