



Volume 1 — Autumn 2011

# WILDER

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Photo courtesy of Kathryn Miller. ([www.katherynamiller.com](http://www.katherynamiller.com), [www.greenmuseum.org](http://www.greenmuseum.org))



# PIMP THE PAVEMENT

A Primer in Seed Bombing and Guerilla Gardening

Text by Lisa Rovner



Photo by Donald Loggins (*Liz Christy Community Gardens*)



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Photos by Donald Loggins (*Liz Christy Community Gardens*)

Remember “Miss Rumphius,” the Lupine Lady? The children’s fiction book by Barbara Cooney (Puffin 1982) recounts the story of Miss Alice Rumphius, a woman who sought to make the world more beautiful by spreading lupine seeds in the wild. Flash back to New York in the 1970s and meet Liz Christy and her Green Guerillas group, who took to beautifying crumbling Manhattan neighborhoods by tossing “seed grenades” into abandoned lots. The first seed grenades, a term coined by Christy, were made from controversial ingredients: condoms filled with local wildflower seeds, water, and fertilizer. They were thrown over fences onto New York City’s wastelands in order to “green up” neglected urban land. Seed bombing, as it’s known today, is definitely punk, but it’s also a cheap and effective way for you, me, and everyone we know to transform an eyesore into a resource.

The seed bomb growing method has been practiced globally for centuries. The idea germinated in Japan with the ancient practice of “tsuchi dango,” which translates as “earth dumpling.” The idea was re-invented in the 20th Century by the Japanese farmer and philosopher, Masanobu Fukuoka, advocate of Do-Nothing Farming and author of the classic, “One-Straw Revolution.”

Today seed bombs are wrapped in compost and clay, which protects the seeds while providing needed moisture, nutrients and structure for seed germination and growth. The seed bomb protects seeds from being eaten by wildlife, so few seeds are needed when compared to broadcast seeding. As much as 80% of broadcast seeds, those scattered on the surface of the soil, can be lost before germination.

Some argue seed bombs could be used for large-scale interventions in places damaged by man-made or natural disasters, such as wildfires and floods. Scientists have learned that certain types of plants absorb toxins from the soil without dying and can thus be used as a mechanism to reduce chemical ground pollution. So why not use seed bombs to restore our forests and purify our soil?

In 2010, Greenaid, a Los Angeles-based organization founded by designers Daniel Phillips and Kim Karlsrud, began converting

vintage gumball machines into seed bomb dispensers. Drop fifty cents in one of their recycled candy machines and you get a seed bomb. Greenaid describes it as “Change for Change.” Check out their website to find a dispenser near you. Surprisingly, they’re all over the country.

Christy and the Green Guerillas went on to transform a derelict lot on Manhattan’s Houston St. and the Bowery into a community garden that New Yorkers still revel in today. During the 1970s financial crisis, many NYC landlords abandoned their properties. The city, in fiscal disarray, bulldozed deserted derelict apartment buildings and left remaining residents with vacant lots and broken neighborhoods. Christy and a small community of downtown New Yorkers decided to take matters into their own hands. They hauled out the trash, a pile six-feet high, leveled the gravel underneath, and trucked in soil. They planted seeds and young plants recycled from a Parks Department giveaway. When city officials began to crack down on them, Christy went to the media. After the New York Daily News published an article and photos of the garden, officials changed course: for a dollar a year, they leased the lot to the Green Guerillas. In 1974 The Liz Christy Community Garden became the first community garden in New York City, and is still cared for by volunteers and protected by the Parks Department. More than 1,000 registered or permitted community gardens have since sprouted.

Guerilla gardening is a form of political action that addresses questions of responsibility and choice. “The Earth is a Common Treasury for All,” professed Gerrard Winstanley, who, in 1649, took over common or vacant areas of England with his group of political radicals, the Diggers, committing the first recorded act of guerrilla gardening.

A global army of guerilla gardeners has since taken form, transforming urban wastelands into flowerbeds and butterfly havens. In 1996, approximately 500 activists occupied a vast piece of derelict land belonging to Guinness Brewery on the banks of the River Thames in South London. Their action aimed to bring light to, as they declared,



“the appalling misuse of urban land, the lack of provision of affordable housing and the deterioration of the urban environment.” Within weeks of this incident, a group of 1,000 in Denmark spent a night transforming an empty piece of land in the middle of Copenhagen into a garden. On May 1, 2010, marking International Sunflower Guerrilla Gardening Day, more than 5,000 people across the globe participated by planting sunflower seeds in public spaces. In London alone, thousands of people gathered at Parliament Square in one of the biggest orchestrated actions of guerrilla gardening ever seen. They planted flowers and vegetables, and hung banners that read, “Let London Sprout,” “Capitalism is Pants,” and “Resistance is Fertile.”

Seed bombs are definitely my weapon of choice. In the palm of your hand, you have a revolution waiting to happen. Something so powerful, it can radically change the face of the earth. The beauty of seed bombing is its potential to transform, as well as its accessibility. Anyone can make seed bombs with instructions found in the internet. Who decides what our communities look like? We do.

As Woody Guthrie sings:

*This land is your land*

*This land is my land*

*From California, to the New York Island*

*From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf Stream waters*

*This land was made for you and me.*

Pimp the pavement people!



Photo by Donald Loggins (*Liz Christy Community Gardens*)



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# Green Guerillas



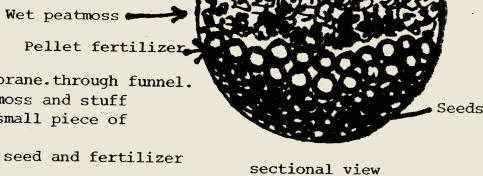
Seed Grenade Recipes  
(For vacant lot bombing, or how to hide illegal dumping space)

PREASSEMBLE THE FOLLOWING INGREDIENTS:

- A. Old Christmas ball ornaments with metal hangers removed  
Small funnel  
Pelletized, time-release fertilizer  
Small bits of moist peatmoss  
Seeds, suitable for time of bombing and desired effect --list below  
Piece of kleenex or other tissue paper
- B. Small balloons  
Funnel  
Pelletized time release fertilizer  
Water and watering can  
Seeds, see list below

ADD:

seed and fertilizer to grenade membrane through funnel.  
In variety A, add wet bits of peatmoss and stuff opening at top with small piece of tissue paper.  
With variety B, be sure to add the seed and fertilizer before adding water.  
Both varieties A and B should be handled with care.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE:

Choose a lot that has a fence and is legally inaccessible. Calculate in advance how many grenades will be needed to cover the area. Check carefully before throwing seed grenade. Observe all normal safety precautions. Perfected throwing techniques are: for Christmas ornaments--use underhand throw and for the heavier water balloons--an overhand toss.

SEED LIST

for early fall	for early spring	for late spring	for early summer
Soybeans	batchelor buttons	cosmos	sunflower
Clover	dianthus	portulaca	ornamental grass mix
Winter Rye	wildflower mix	zinnia	marigold
cleome	plain old grass	nicotiana	zinnia

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Image courtesy of Green Guerillas.