

## ECOLOGIC

# Community Help For Greening Vacant Plots

In New York City, the idea of outsourcing maintenance of vacant plots to community groups that are willing to maintain the green space proved to be a win-win for the city departments as there are 150 such gardens in Manhattan serving the community

For every home a garden" is an aspiration for all —whether we can afford the luxury of space or not. Managing a home garden is a tough ask with today's busy schedules and the general lack of land for planting. But yet it remains a dream for each of us to have and own. The benefits of plants have been proven time and again in every possible aspect, but in today's context there is a lot more that we can hope to achieve by maintaining our own little green paradise.

At the start of this millennium, I was a young student of urbanism in New York City. One of my first projects was to map out existing and potential community gardens in the borough of Manhattan. I found the concept completely intriguing. A group of strangers would respectfully share a space and maintain their own little garden patch in the midst of an uber urban environment. Today there are about 150 such community gardens in Manhattan, managed primarily by the Parks Department but serving the larger community.

The idea of outsourcing the maintenance of vacant-city owned lots to commu-



nity groups that are willing to maintain the green space proved to be a win-win for the city departments and the grassroots neighbourhood revitalisation efforts. Anyone can join a garden as a member or a volunteer and become part of the effort. The green guerilla movement of the 60's had turned into a legitimate way of managing open lots by the 90's. This is just a single

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example of good citizens ensuring the overall well-being of a community at large.

As the designer of larger townships, there is often the question of maintenance, especially of open areas and when there is 'community land' in excess of minimum mandatory allowances. All of us want low maintenance stuff around us — low maintenance homes, cars and spouses. But in reality, nothing can survive without main-

tenance, not even our own bodies. Life requires maintenance for sustenance!

In most large scale dense projects it is good to address privately managed green spaces on two scales — one at the scale of the community and the other at an individual unit. Most sustainable measures will ensure that the mandatory open community spaces are automatically provided on the ground. The tighter the footprint of a building on a site, the better it scores on sustainability. It is possible to consider fruit groves or orchards as a green cover or landscape. Their produce can be harvested and sold as an added stream of revenue. Alternately, a community green space could function like the community gardens of New York — an area of joint responsibility wherein it is easy to have a small portion or patch that each person is responsible for. The focus on organic food and sustainability could influence our new towns to adopt some form of community gardening as a practice. Holistic sustainability ensures the best for the ecology and the economy.

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