



Community Gardening: Greening a City's Most Urban Corners

by Nancy VanHorn

Amidst the skyscrapers of some of America's largest cities, small patches of green flourish – community gardens – created by residents of nearby buildings and offices. As the environmental movement has gained popularity and support over the last several decades, community gardening has evolved from its roots. The small, isolated efforts of citizens to reclaim unused land have been transformed into large-scale projects supported by local residents, philanthropists, and governmental agencies.

American cities faced many challenges during the 1970s. Budget cuts, crumbling infrastructure, and the exodus of the middle class to the suburbs provided urban activists with an opportunity: a chance to change abandoned lots into green oases in some of the poorest neighborhoods. The Green Guerillas of New York helped pioneer the community garden movement. In 1973, on the lower east side of Manhattan, a group of community activists rallied their neighbors to revitalize a derelict lot, creating a garden in one of the most industrial corners of New York's "urban jungle."



Green Guerillas Project

Since then, community gardening has spread across the U.S., taking a variety of forms. It can be the rooftop flower garden in Boston, the organic vegetable plot between two business towers in Washington, D.C., or the pots with herbs spilling over the balcony in downtown Seattle. More and more Americans, even those who have never lived outside a city, take part in the green movement in these small but significant ways.

While the Green Guerillas originally planted their "seed bombs" – they produced flowers and herbs, not ordnance! – without any sort of official permission, community gardening is no longer considered a fringe activity. Now, local governments recognize that these gardens can provide food for the poor and improve health. By offering residents a chance to work in the open air, the gardens underscore the importance of a balanced diet and exercise. Many of the gardens exist in areas with few trees and limited parks. The garden in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York (an intensely urban, low-income environment) offers local kids

perhaps their only chance to actually plant a seed and watch it grow; it is often the only direct tie a child has to the earth. Activists maintain that educating children about their food sources leads to healthier food choices, promoting good habits that will stay with children through their lifetimes.

In many cities, the local parks department or community development agency administers the gardens, providing not only the official permission for the projects, but often the financial resources also. Some estimates place the number of these gardens at higher than 5000 (about 600 of them are in New York City alone). Most major city administrations in the U.S. now provide guidance on obtaining permission to start a project and ideas on how to identify partners.

Perhaps the most visible community green project of the last ten years is the High Line, a former elevated viaduct running along Manhattan's west side. Originally designed as a track for freight trains transporting goods through New York City, the 2.3-kilometer line was closed in 1980 when truck transport became more common within city limits. Over the next few decades, the High Line became a wilderness located in the middle of a gentrifying

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Photo of the early Green Guerillas at work

The American Center

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H O L I D A Y S

April 22: Good Friday

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Dear Readers,

April is the month in which we celebrate Earth Day. Since the 1970s, environmental awareness has developed from a niche issue into a pervasive global mind-set. An entirely new lexicon reflects a growing awareness of environmental issues and the imperatives of resource conservation.

The pursuit of sustainable development and promotion of corporate social and environmental responsibility are the new standards. Development of “green technology” and “green-collar jobs” are cited by officials and investors as an area of tremendous potential economic growth. The phenomenon of global climate change has broad economic, political and security implications that no nation in the world can afford to ignore.

The United States and India are committed to working together to advance environmental protection and resource conservation. In 2009, the U.S.-India Green Partnership was announced. This past February, the Natural Resources Defense Council, an independent nongovernmental organization, published a report highlighting the positive results of this two-year-old effort. I invite you to take a look at the report online: <http://www.nrdc.org/international/india/files/usindiagreening.pdf>.

As the new Information Officer for the Consulate, I look forward to the opportunity to interact with you in person at the American Center or virtually via e-mail, Facebook or Twitter. The communications role has two sides: speaking and listening. So please send in your ideas, comments and complaints to begin the dialogue!

Kapil Gupta
Information Officer

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neighborhood. This area of Manhattan is now filled with high-end stores and cafes. Real estate developers eyed the land, but a group of community activists (including high-profile film stars) banded together and lobbied the city's administration to preserve the space as a park. Sections of it are still being revitalized, but the first portion opened in June 2009. Plants from more than 210 species comprise the green space, most of them native to North America, such as clump-forming grasses, coneflowers, sumac, and smokebush. Even the park benches are made from sustainably-harvested timber. Like many community-based green projects, the High Line has produced a ripple effect – more than 30 similar projects in the area are now in the planning or

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We look forward to hearing from you.



Earth Day: Environmentalists call for a climate action during the Earth Day celebration on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. on April 25, 2010. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

implementation stages, according to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

The High Line offers an excellent example of what community involvement and a little creativity can achieve. The Green Guerillas' idea of community-focused gardens in an urban setting has taken root throughout the U.S., giving even the most dedicated urbanites a chance to experience the wonders of nature.

More information about community gardens can be found at:

<http://www.thehighline.org>

<http://www.greenguerillas.org>

<http://www.communitygarden.org>

Nancy VanHorn works at the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai

NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

Select Resources Available on the Environment

Journal

E – The Environmental Magazine

Earth Action Network

This magazine acts as a clearing house for information, news and commentary on environmental issues. It strives to advance ecological perspectives, increase attention to environmental issues, and enlist greater support for environmental protection efforts.



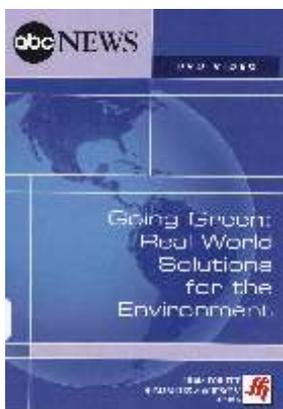
DVDs

Going Green: Real-World Solutions for the Environment

Films for the Humanities & Sciences

(2007, 44 mins)

This video is a compilation of 12 ABC News stories on environmental stewardship. It showcases how governments, businesses, and individuals around the world are taking concrete, eco-friendly action.

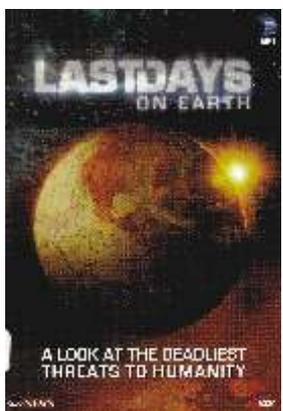


Last Days on Earth: A Look at the Deadliest Threats to Humanity

ABC News

(2006, 85 mins)

This DVD takes viewers inside seven of the deadliest threats to humanity using computer generated graphics and interviews with the world's top scientists. The deadly scenarios include: Death of a Star: Gamma Ray Burst and Black Hole; Intelligent Machines; Supervolcano; Asteroid; Nuclear War; Plague; and Climate Change.

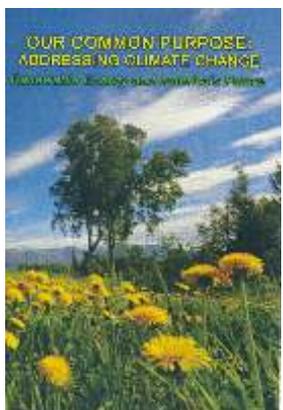


Our Common Purpose: Addressing Climate Change – Renewable Energy and America's Future

U.S. Department of State

(2009, 45 mins)

Our Common Purpose reflects the breadth and depth of America's commitment to climate change. The 19 individual video clips from various government agencies, the private sector, NGOs, national associations, and educational television producers, show the diversity of America's response to the problems of climate change and America's commitment to help find solutions to critical environmental and energy issues.



Ask a Librarian: Please write to the American Library at libref@state.gov for research queries related to information on U.S. international relations, education, law and legislation, English language, and literature.

**American Wildlife
Discussion led by Carey Rudell**

**Monday, April 18
American Center Auditorium**

6:00 p.m.

America is host to a wide variety of fish, mammals, and fowl. Some are endangered, while some previously endangered species are resurging. Conservation programs are reintroducing some animals to their former habitats. America's wildlife is one of the country's most beautiful national treasures. The U.S. Government and private organizations are working to protect these amazing creatures.

Carey Rudell has memorable personal experiences of American wildlife from her childhood in the rural Midwest and family visits to the Rocky Mountains. She has a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, and an M.A. from George Washington University.

Join us in the American Center auditorium on **April 13 at 6:00 p.m.** for a staged reading of *Waking Up in Brahmin Heights*, followed by a discussion.

This play, written by Jillian Campana, is set in present-day Mumbai and showcases the cross-cultural relationship between a newly-expatriated American family from Ohio and a caste-conscious Hindu family.

**American Center Auditorium
3:30 and 6:30 p.m.**

Friday, April 8

WALL-E
(2008, 98 mins)

Seven hundred years from now, mankind has abandoned a trash-filled, ecologically ravaged Earth, leaving a planet full of garbage to be compacted by robots like little WALL-E (voiced by Ben Burtt). When a sleek "female" robot is sent to Earth to search for signs of life by the captain (Jeff Garlin) piloting humanity's spaceship home away from home, WALL-E finds both love and a renewed purpose.



Friday, April 29

The Day After Tomorrow
(2004, 123 mins)

Dennis Quaid stars as a scientist whose warnings of an impending second ice age becomes a devastating reality. With much of the northern hemisphere frozen solid, Quaid must make a desperate trek to New York City to rescue son Jake Gyllenhaal, braving earthquakes, hurricanes, and blizzards along the way. Sela Ward, Emmy Rossum, Dash Mihok, and Ian Holm costar.



**Fun
Facts**

Energy saved from one recycled aluminum can will operate a TV set for 3 hours, and is the equivalent to half a can of gasoline.

- Department of Energy

Every ton of recycled office paper saves 380 gallons of oil.

- Department of Energy

Glass produced from recycled glass instead of raw materials reduces related air pollution by 20%, and water pollution by 50%.

- Department of Natural Resources

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