

Seventeen planters, placed by the city over a year ago to deter people from relaxing in front of an unoccupied downtown building, yet never filled with life.

Nine, approximately 22'x25' austere, concrete boxes lining the front of the federal courthouse, each occupied by a single tree, the soil below it left bare save for a thin layer of mulch.

Sites of proposed data centers might look nicer with Willamette daisy or Columbia yellowcress planted, two endangered—and protected—species.

Countless hellstrips, empty lots, monocrops of nonnative turf grass, riparian zones overtaken by Himalayan blackberry and bull thistle, every Jennings apartment yard—cracks and corners everywhere that have the potential to contribute to healthier urban ecosystems, and to strengthen hyperlocal food systems.

“We plant the revolution,” a gardening friend recently said to me. I would agree. There is no just reason why a person could starve if they don’t have the money to eat; why a city must create heat islands increasing daytime averages by 1-7°F (Bend’s heat islands have recently scored in the top 20 in the nation); why bees struggle to find healthy habitat in Oregon; why a landlord or a “developer” can choose to exterminate a prairie full of life and replace it with a yardful of rocks, or nonnative turf grass and two struggling, ornamental shrubs kept shorn to tight cubes. Though we live in a city, it is not disconnected from the living planet—and, if we would like to survive the impacts of the changing climate, it cannot be.

Soil, the world’s largest terrestrial carbon sink, warrants intentional care. Compared to soil covered by plants with deep root systems, bare soil has a lower ability to store carbon, retains less moisture, and lacks stability. The addition of green space—both the abundance and cover of

vegetation—to an urban environment has a cooling effect of 5.4°F, as a global average. Given our lack of humidity compared to other regions, such as the southeastern United States, this figure may even be higher. On the food security side of this crisis, nearly a fifth of Lane County residents use SNAP benefits to feed themselves (this is a figure from 2025; funding cuts may have decreased this number, though certainly not the need). 28% of adults and 27% of children in the county who do not qualify for SNAP still report food insecurity.

Our current networks of habitat and food systems are patchwork, fragmented. We, and wildlife, and the nutrients cycling through the world are relying on emergency provisions rather than stable ground.

So, I recently started Ghost Gardening Club with a couple coworkers and some new friends. We are a team of organic farmers, botanists, nursery workers, and—above all else—gardeners, on a mission to regenerate all the places in our beautiful city that have gone untended, neglected.

We have, so far, collected several thousand native seeds (camas, broad leaf lupine, Oregon fawn-lily, Oregon geranium, piggyback plant, California poppy) and begun mapping out planting sites to focus on. Last week, we had two work parties to replant a large patch left barren by a landlord. I showed a friend's kid how to use a broadfork on the compacted, bone-dry soil, and watched the two of them giggle over the Excalibur-like challenge of getting some pore space into bare ground that had been left to bake for months, maybe longer. As we planted, several neighbors walking and biking by hollered well wishes, hoping our work will grow into something beautiful. Now the space is full of vegetable and flower seeds starting to germinate. In time, it will provide tenants with food and help support pollinators and soil health. We will stock neighborhood seed libraries, pass along plants, make preserves. We hope to connect with more business and

renters/homeowners with empty ground in addition to having a lot of guerrilla fun.

Want to get involved? We're having a special event to celebrate the 250th anniversary of this county that incentivizes dead urban landscapes. We'll be making 250 (or more) native seed bombs, along with 250 fruit and vegetable seed bombs. Some of these will be for storage, as fall planting will greatly diminish the need for watering while seeds get established, and allow for the cold stratification period some seeds need to germinate, like camas and salal.

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