

Chicago, with its official motto *Urbs in Hortus* (City in a Garden), gets all the good press as a green city. Toronto is relegated to poor-cousin status, lagging far behind on the greening front. Certainly, budgets contribute to the disparity: Chicago devotes significant financial resources to horticultural beautification projects, such as making the Magnificent Mile (the upscale shopping district along North Michigan Avenue) bloom magnificently, with colourful botanical displays planted along the broad streetscape.

But it's more than money that makes the difference. Toronto could throw thousands at the annual flower plantings up and down University Avenue (as it started to do in the summer of 2005, with cascading foliage spilling over concrete planting boxes, courtesy of Mayor David Miller's Clean and Beautiful City initiative), and we still wouldn't be a 'garden in a city.' For that, we need a gardening ethos that seeps not just into thumbs but into minds, leading us away from stodgy conformity (the lawn-and-order aesthetic that surrounds us) and towards brash acts of botanical abandon.

For guidance, we could look to the growing signs that creative stewards on a greening mission are lurking in Toronto's gardening fringes: The proliferation of front-yard plots full of personality and not an inch of inch-high (water-guzzling, fertilizer-hungry) lawn grass. Green roofs in surprising places, like the John Street Pumping Station. Vegetables planted outside stores in concrete boxes on Bloor Street. School grounds where kids can actually touch soil – less asphalt, more cup plants. Community centres where people grow tomatoes so the food bank is stocked with something almost alive. Housing co-ops where residents take charge of their courtyards, planting and maintaining their gardens communally. Parks where neighbours tend crops in allotment plots, and the dynam-

ics of crowded living get negotiated over the shared hose instead of the private fence. Groups like the Toronto Public Space Committee's guerrilla gardening squad, which attract crowds to late-night alley plantings.

The growing signs are out there, but the symbols are lacking. Consider this: Wisconsin has an official state soil. Toronto doesn't even have an official floral emblem. Ontario's got the trillium, the Canadian flag has the taxonomically challenged maple leaf (is it a red maple, a sugar maple or a sport of nature not found in the field guides?), and Etobicoke has a species of politically incorrect common milkweed (probably the only floral emblem anywhere that's included in a legislated noxious weed list and, hence, mandated for eradication).

If one looks to City Hall, though, for symbolic green guidance, it can be found – in an unlikely place: on the roof. Here, in 2000, municipal headquarters was crowned with a fuzzy horticultural cap in the form of a green roof, intended as both inspiration and experiment.

With eight different demonstration garden beds, each one focusing on a specific habitat model, Toronto City Hall's green roof was hooked up to gadgets that measure the amount of rainfall captured by the soil (and hence saved from the storm sewers) and read the temperature at various points on the roof. The researchers who are compiling and analyzing the stats hope to contribute hard data to the growing scientific literature on green-roof benefits – adding much-needed substance to the anecdotally persuasive assertion that growing plants everywhere we can – even on rooftops – is a good thing. Sort of like hair on your head – feels cooler, less run-off.

The City Hall green roof is now a bit of an orphan, not particularly championed or nurtured by any department or group, and that too is symbolic. Though Toronto has moved far beyond its uptight days when gardeners incurred municipal wrath (and cease-and-desist orders) for growing vegetables in their front yards, some city departments and politicians are still vestigially hostile to anything that deviates from the rigid code of our collective conformity: the lawn. Thus, a gardener on Davenport Road, on the steeply sloped glacial Lake Iroquois shoreline, could be ordered in the spring of 2005 to trim back the foliage spilling over the erosion-preventing retaining wall. Apparently, stroller-pushing parents and babes in prams would be assaulted by this unruly growth, this sidewalk traffic hazard, according to the city's property standards department.

Likewise, a couple of boulevard gardeners at two different properties in Etobicoke were ordered to remove their plantings on strips of land between the sidewalk and the street: illegal encroachments, according to the city, though homeowners are legally obliged to maintain these strips – but only with lawn grass, it seems.

Vancouver, on the other hand, takes a different approach. The Green Streets Program actually *encourages* people to garden the boulevards, and green-thumb enthusiasts fan out through the city with trowels and watering cans, claiming sidewalk strips and traffic circle medians as their own fugitive plots. What would be considered rogue activity according to Toronto's rules is sanctioned in Vancouver – the city even gives volunteers snappy orange vests, which lend a quaint air of worker-chic to the whole enterprise.

Annual flowers in boulevard planters along University Avenue might make Toronto look a bit better (especially when one is driving by at sixty kilometres an hour), but meaningful change isn't annual, withering and fading like petunias and pansies. It's deep rooted and perennial, just like the enduring change that Toronto's growing band of rogue gardeners is digging in and planting.

Dedicated to Dagmar Baur and Zora Ignatovic, and with thanks to Andrew Leyerle.