



Plant By Number

In the American frontier story, farming became a visible means of claiming space. Even today, food production remains a “clear way to emphasize one’s right to have a say in planning.”¹ Guerrilla gardening, specifically by city dwellers adopting forgotten urban spaces, provides an outlet for place-based action and civic involvement. This kind of space hijacking fits squarely into the American ethic, specifically when it comes to converting underused land into a more productive capacity.

While this unsolicited engagement with the landscape often reveals unexpected adjacencies or efficiencies, many growers lack information about how and where to plant. Regional data, such as growing seasons, soil types and drainage, air and water quality, and solar access may not be obvious to a new farmer. Serving as an intermediary between data collection sources and the public, informed designers can develop open-source Plant-By-Number guidance for new farmers. These plans would be printed out full size on a root-barrier felt, creating a visual invitation in the landscape for budding growers.

Plant-By-Number has an inherent flexibility that allows for endless data-based permutations, including plot size, growing regions, and seasonal considerations. It can be designed and printed remotely, then set up by guerilla gardeners as needed. Plant-By-Number felt creates a physical advertisement in the landscape: a visual expression of intention and call for action. Moreover, the Plant-By-Number felt landscape serves as a set of printed instructions for gardeners to follow if they need support; it has the potential to share information, inspire action and empower novice gardeners.

As with other roads, replanting the freeway corridor involves thinking about the landscape in terms of distinct phases. Because leaded gasoline has washed off the roads into adjacent soil, initial phases of Plant-By-Number could be used for phytoremediation, biofuels and the creation of wildlife habitat. Future phases might incorporate shade trees, and edibles without lead risk, followed by more traditional garden plots of fruit trees and edible perennials. Every Plant-By-

¹ Ingo Vetter, “Urban Agriculture,” Philipp Oswald, ed. *Shrinking Cities*, volume 1, (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 493.

Number felt print would respond to the unique needs of a given location, and adjust planting suggestions accordingly.

Like the apple orchards planted by settlers in the expansion of the American West, these Plant-By-Number food corridors could continue to serve future generations for years. Plant-By-Number plans would highlight long-term land use and hardy, low-maintenance plants. The sectional qualities of roads in the U.S. already support water drainage and therefore most of this land could be planted for seasonal self-watering.

As a grassroots movement, Plant-By-Number landscapes would require nominal tools, material, time and capital. The printed planting felt would be plotted much like the billboard signage already ubiquitous in the urban realm. This felt would be fixed to the ground with tent stakes, and cut with a utility knife at fixed locations to reveal portions of the soil below. Gardeners would need to supply their own seeds, starts, and shovels.

Successional dynamics--- the evolution of a species relative to its habitat--- also inform human ecologies. Unlike top-down planning efforts, personal engagement with the landscape powerfully defines physical space: “these behaviors, not zoning ordinances, constitute the above-mentioned protocols, ones to which every urban plan is subject, however small, whether the architect wishes to engage them or not.”² As designers conceive of a world beyond oil, their work has the power to facilitate the regeneration of the built environment with an open invitation to plant along road networks. Fortunately, Plant-By-Number success hinges upon the response of the rogue gardener- the true architect of this photosynthetic infrastructure.

² Roger Sherman, “Property: Counting on Change,” Kazys Varnelis, ed. *The Infrastructural City*, (New York: Actar Barcelona, 2008), 183.