

The New York Times

The Blog Generation

By HILLARY ROSNER

AS the manager of an indie-rock band fronted by an accordion player, Camille Accey, 23, is used to uphill battles. So when Ms. Accey and the band, Movers and Shakers, decided to build a "rock garden" on the roof of a loft building in Long Island City, Queens, they solved the obvious problem with 175 pounds of neutral-tone buttons from a company that donates surplus materials to artists.

Ms. Accey was a contestant in a "gardening challenge" sponsored by ReadyMade, a Berkeley-based do-it-yourself magazine for those who are young, hip and inclined to turn their soda empties into camp stoves. The participants, chosen by the editors, had to remake a 100-square-foot space, relying on found objects and the landscape's existing features, all within a \$200 budget provided by the magazine.

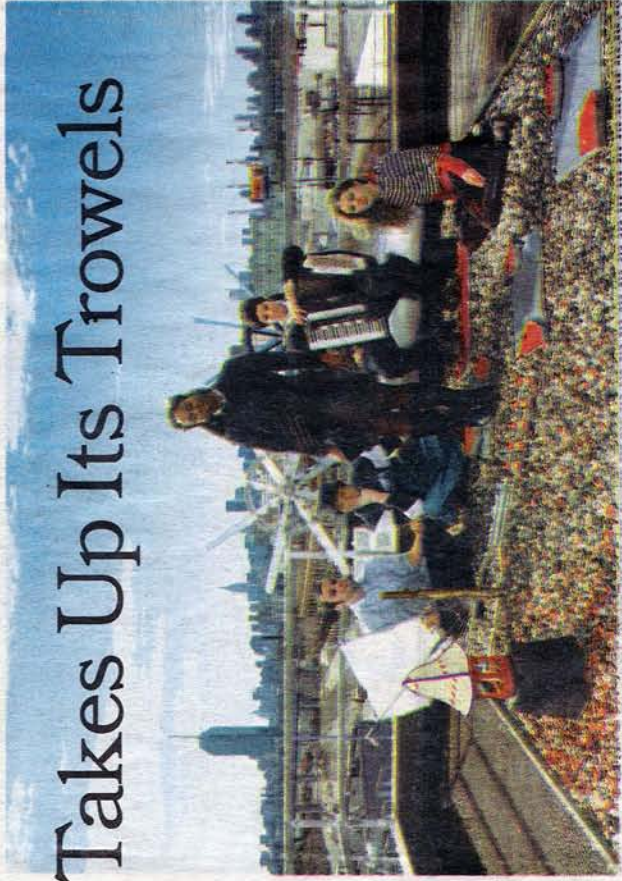
"Creative reuse was the central thing for us," said Ms. Accey, who writes a Web log

and has sought gardening advice online from other bloggers. "I'm not a high-end person who's going to go spend \$200 at Home Depot."

Ms. Accey may not fit the traditional image of a gardener, but she shares a passion that is blossoming among a certain segment of culturally plugged-in urban 20-somethings and early-30-somethings. They may not own backyards, but they are determined to make things grow. Many quietly cite Martha Stewart as an influence, while making clear that they disapprove of her "commercialism," as one of them, Briana Drennon, put it. And like 1960's hippies, some see what they are doing as an act of protest against the degradation of the environment and the spread of agribusiness.

"I'm thinking about gardening as a radical political act," said Fritz Haeg, 34, an architect who teaches in the environmental design program at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif. "It means completely questioning the way we live, the way

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Kate Lacey

INDIE LANDSCAPING Surrounded by members of the band she manages, Camille Accey, center, takes the air on her rooftop garden in Long Island City, Queens. In place of rocks, Ms. Accey, 23, substituted 175 pounds of buttons.

The Blog Generation Takes Up Its Trowels

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we get our food, the way we use and abuse natural resources, the way we occupy public space." Mr. Haeg plays host at a monthly salon that draws a young, flamboyant crowd. Events are themed — "avant-garde knitting" was a recent topic.

While gardening has yet to reach critical mass among this group, it is beginning to make an impact. Peter Bosseimann, chairman of landscape architecture and environmental planning at the University of California, Berkeley, said he has seen a bit of a shift among applicants for the graduate program over the last four years. Traditionally, students came with experience in horticulture, but now, Mr. Bosseimann said, they increasingly have art-related backgrounds.

"It's pretty clear that young people are decidedly interested in or concerned about the landscape," he said. "Most perceive it as chaotic or in need of care and health, in need of introducing ecological principles, in need of being more artful, more structured."

Ms. Drennon, 27, who calls herself "a typical L.A. indie walking stereotype" complete with art degree and tattoos, said her gardening habit began with "a pot of rosemary on a windowsill."

"Everything just sort of rolled from there," she said. Lured by a 2,000-square-foot yard, she moved from a funky Koreatown loft to leather Venice. She also joined You Grow Girl, an online gardening site that says it "speaks to a new kind of gardener." The site, at www.yourowgirl.com, is the brainchild of Gayla Sanders, 30, a graphic designer in Toronto, who started it out of frustration with other online gardening communities. To her, they all seemed aimed at an older suburban audience, with a significantly higher disposable income.

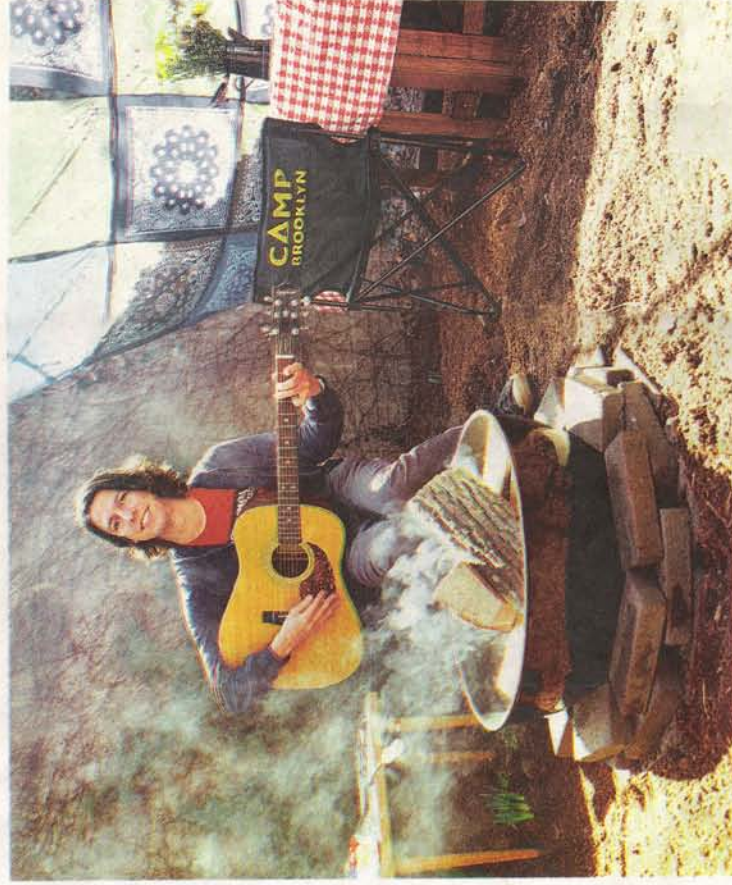
"There definitely is this stigma that gardening is something that women who are housewives do, or something that only goes on in the country," Ms. Drennon said.

On an April morning, seed packets spilled across her 40's-diner-style kitchen table. The seeds, for flowers and vegetables with names like papaya pear hybrid squash and Flaro-French flagoleet, were booty from a seed swap organized by You Grow Girl. She said that members send around a big box of seeds they aren't going to use. Each takes what she wants, adds her own leftovers and mails the box to the next person on the list. "It's like Secret Santa in April," Ms. Drennon said.

Lauren Smith, another ReadyMade challenge participant, turned her yard in Brooklyn into a kitschy urban campground. "We took the legs off our barbecue and built a campfire pit," said Ms. Smith, 28, the assistant to the fashion designer Todd Oldham. "We put down mulch and took a bunch of bandannas and stitched them together to create an awning."

Ms. Smith and her boyfriend, Derek Fagersstrom, 28, the editorial production director at Esquire magazine, have mapped out a border of annuals around the campground and recently planted a cherry tree in the yard. The appeal of gardening, Ms. Smith said, "is that your concerns are: 'How will I stake my tomato plant? How can I get these bugs to stop eating?' It's a total escape. You don't think about your e-mail or your job."

Many young gardeners say they are cultivating patience along with plants. "It's such an obvious antidote to multitasking, to sitting in front of a computer, to the complicatedness of our lives," said Amy Talkington,



Photographs by Kate Lacey (above and below left)

Suddenly, gardening is hot: what a way to get your mind off multitasking.

32, a filmmaker who has planted a Japanese maple, lantana, verbena and jasmine outside the bungalow she rents in the Little Armenia section of Hollywood.

Kerry Tribe, 31, grew plants in window boxes in New York, where she lived briefly and worked as a bike messenger, among other things, before moving to Los Angeles. She began gardening obsessively during graduate school at the University of California campus there. Her inspiration was a project she devised, taking literally what she called the "hothouse" vibe of the master's program in fine arts — "prowl collectors and dealers coming around to see what was new." Ms. Tribe transformed her studio into a hydroponic garden, growing plants solely for their names, like Celebrity Tomatoes and Early Wonder Beets.

"They were all qualities we were expected to cultivate in our art," she said. "People would say,

URBAN GREENS Shannon Ferguson, left, supplies the music at Lauren Smith's backyard "campground" in Brooklyn. Ms. Smith stitched bandannas into awnings; beer cans, inset, were dressed up in napkins. Annuals are next on her list. Below, Amra Brooks may be a renter, but she lavishes attention on her yard in

Los Angeles. Bottom, Fritz Haeg, also of Los Angeles, assembles a bouquet in his garden. Mr. Haeg said he thinks of gardening as "a radical political act."



Photographs by Mariana Roth for The New York Times (above and below left)

"Where's your stuff?" and I'd say, "This is it — maybe we can have a conversation about gardening or something."

Like Mr. Haeg, at the Art Center College of Design, Ms. Tribe sees a political side to gardening: "It's a private act, but also a public act of resistance to the sprawling L.A. wasteland and the toxins in the air."

A similar spirit motivates Alexis Rivera, 26, a music critic and club promoter, who gardens with native plants and a certain amount of attitude on a hillside next to his apartment in the rapidly gentrifying Echo Park section of Los Angeles. "I don't have much money, so I steal stuff," said Mr. Rivera, adding that he once took a large fern from a fancy Beverly Hills hotel.

Gardening at rental properties carries its own challenges, like negotiating with landlords and reconciling your own transience with the relative permanence of the trees you plant. Amra Brooks, 30, a writer who rents a house in Atwater Village, near the concrete channel of the Los Angeles River, said she has spent at least \$500 on her garden. She planted native perennials to attract birds and butterflies and several fruit trees. She has a mission that extends beyond her lease. "With all the native stuff, you feel like you're giving back to the environment," she said. "That feels cool. Whether I live here or not, hopefully that tree will always be here."