

Let's imagine a scenario. You're out walking on a sunny day and the streets are full of colour and cheer. You might even be whistling. You're transported with delight, until your mood shifts suddenly as you feel a cold trickle down your neck. You've walked under a freshly watered hanging basket. Instantly you're reminded of just how much you loathe hanging baskets. Your mood darkens as you contemplate the vulgar annuals, the enormous wasted expense, the extravagance with water, the unsustainable use of peat in potting mediums. People could be doing something useful with their time instead of planting these damn baskets! The sky has blackened with clouds, and you can hear distant thunder. Petunias. Bah!

The US-based Project for Public Spaces, however, exhorts us to "start with the Petunias" in their *Eleven Principles for Turning Public Spaces Into Civic Places*, "Short-term actions, like planting flowers, can be a way of not only testing ideas, but also giving people the confidence that change is occurring and that their ideas matter." Hanging baskets and other floral displays are more than just 'quick wins,' though. For many local authorities they are not just a way of demonstrating commitment on the way to a sweeping solution, but they are consistent, everyday 'wins' that are a visible show of continued care and action.

Many years ago, when I was working for Rummey Design, we took a field trip to see the Coventry Phoenix Initiative, a sparkling regeneration project that our practice had undertaken. It was crisply executed and studded with public art and architectural features; a typical display of the showers of New Labour largesse characteristic of the time. Right in front of the BBC's spanking new office and ill-fitted to and overhanging the angular stone stairs were a series of bulky stainless-steel planters filled with showy annuals. There was no doubt about the fact that these shipwrecked planters looked tokenistic next to the cool and sophisticated design, but on the other hand, could the local authority be faulted for wishing to decorate their new civic rooms? In a way, they were simply moving in and becoming inhabitants, much as one might hang pictures in a new house.

What is the answer, then? Do we continue to specify hooks on lamp standards so that 'pimp my street' bling can continue to be applied? Do we try our best to ignore it? Do we legislate against the *Pelargonium*? Actually, as I write, my window boxes are filled with the most garish *Pelargoniums* I could find, and it pleases me to hear people pause and comment. Recently a fashion photographer posed a model in front of my planters. A windowsill is a natural place for a bit of decoration, and a window box is a token of pride and ownership and a gift of beauty to one's neighbours. We need to include a few windowsill equivalents in our landscape designs, but also to use our skills to rethink display planting. Freiburg im Breisgau has wreathed many of its central streets in *Wisteria*, for example. Arching over the street, it has much greater public meaning as a sign act of beauty and fragrance than it would climbing a private building.

It is important to contemplate what the sustainable, contemporary equivalents of display planting might be. We should, for example, incorporate the WSUD technology of flow-through planters in our streetscape designs. The answers may well emerge from much of the valuable research that has gone into green walls, living roofs, and other such technologies. These have yet to fully connect with the daily civic life of the street. Let's start by rethinking the Petunia.