



WHAT TO DO WHEN THE WORST HAPPENS

COMMUNITY GREENING REVIEW 1999

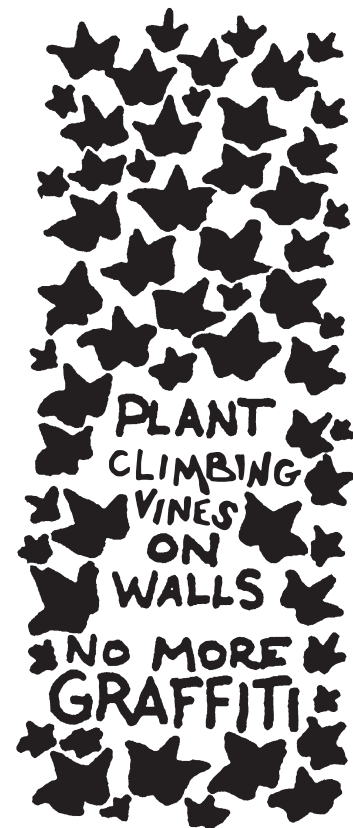
YOU'VE TILLED AND YOU'VE TOILED, now the tomatoes are ripe and the squash is just the perfect size. You and your family are all excited about the harvest.

Then, overnight, your vegetables disappear before you have a chance to enjoy a single one. It's very discouraging. At best, you can hope your work benefitted some hungry soul and the food didn't go to waste. It's even worse when crops you've watered faithfully, mulched, debugged and watched over are trashed by thoughtless vandals. That's utterly depressing – food wasted, beauty destroyed, and gardeners left sick at heart.

Dealing effectively with vandalism and theft poses a real challenge. The best long-term strategy – developing community friendships – takes time; and, even under the best circumstances, both youthful mischief and spiteful nastiness still happen from time to time. Keeping this reality check in mind, these tips can help your garden program minimize problems with vandalism and theft.

Problem solving tips

- **ENCOURAGE** the whole community to take ownership of the garden. Share the pride and satisfaction that comes from tending a bright spot in the neighborhood. (Sharing a few luscious ripe tomatoes doesn't hurt, either).
- **MAKE FRIENDS** with people who live near the garden. Encourage everyone to keep a watchful eye on the garden. Invite neighborhood kids into the garden with you to see what's growing.



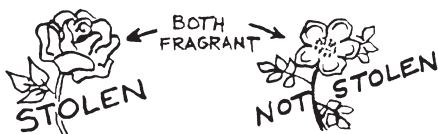
- **REPORT THEFT** or vandalism to gardeners, police, and the neighborhood watch. Post signs announcing that police and neighbors are watching the site. At locked, fenced gardens, consider a “friendly” sign inviting participation – it’s a lot more positive than unadorned chain-link.
- **HOST PUBLIC EVENTS** at the garden especially if it’s fenced and usually locked. Design gathering spaces for all ages, to encourage community building and social interaction.

- **GATES, LOCKS AND FENCES** (from ornate and artsy to plain chain link) deter mischief. At some gardens, they work well; at others, especially in out-of-the-way areas, locks are broken or fences breached.
- **HARVEST PRODUCE REGULARLY.** Have a clear policy about picking without permission. If a gardener makes off with someone else’s harvest, warn the culprit they could lose their place in this community garden. That may be all it takes to stop a problem.

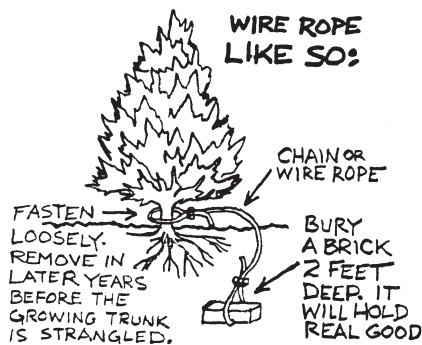
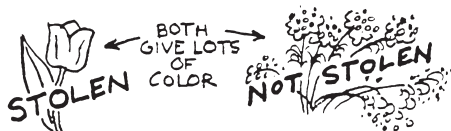
- **KEEP THE GARDEN** well-tended. Encourage gardeners to come regularly, and assign tasks if necessary.
- **REPAIR DAMAGE** quickly. Encourage all gardeners to help restore order. Have “graffiti guerrillas” clean up scrawls and marks right away.
- **CARING COUNTS.** Listen supportively and compassionately to gardeners who have suffered damage, and encourage everyone to share produce with them.

The right plant for the job

- **CULTIVATE** beautiful unfamiliar plants less attractive to blossom snatchers. Observe what gets taken and replace these varieties with alternatives.



“Florist-style” long stem roses make tempting targets. Grow old fashioned and species roses instead. Plant odd-colored edibles – yellow tomatoes, strawberries or raspberries are bothered far less than red (“real”) ones.



- **GROW MORE THAN YOU NEED.** Share the bounty inside and outside the garden.
- **DUST PLANTS WITH FLOUR** or wood ashes. Thieves may avoid plants covered an unknown substance.
- **SOW FLOWERS** thickly around beds to make vegetables more difficult to get to. Put plants with smaller or less-interesting leaves in front of tropical-looking plants with big or colorful leaves like caladiums and hostas.

- **TIE DOWN** expensive plants and garden furniture using chain or airplane cable.
- **PROTECT YOUR GARDEN** nature’s way: Use thorny shrubs, such as rugosa roses, barberry and hollies, as a barrier for delicate and desirable plants. For tough problems, grow your own barbed wire fence: trifoliate orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*).

