

# THE GREAT OUTDOORS



*Epicgardening.com gives instructions on how to make seed bombs; "How to make seed bombs: 3 Different methods," including the Fukuoka Method.*

## **Seed bombs**

*Plant seeds, not bombs! The seed-balls are used for ease of broadcast and to protect the seed until conditions are right for germination.*

By J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

In watching the news as of late, it seems that dropping bombs has once again become all the rage. So I decided to introduce an ancient concept, one involving green benevolence.

The idea occurred to me when seeding flats of herbs and flowers this month – that a more benign warfare was popularized in the

1970s, called “seed bombs.” No drones or napalm were involved, in fact it is quite nonthreatening. So what is a “seed bomb”? It is the use of clay, compost, dirt, and seeds rolled into a ball to grow plants. The clay protects the seed from pests as it germinates, and holds in moisture.

In the 1930s a Japanese farmer, microbiologist, and philosopher, Masanobu Fukuoka (1913-2008) popularized seed balls/bombs as a “do-nothing farming” method: *shizen noho*. He is said to have been inspired by ancient Japanese *tsuchi dango* (earth dumplings). In today’s terms one might say his idea “went viral” in Asia, and planting by using seed balls became very popular.

The concept isn’t that new, and in fact we can even look at ancient uses of seed balls. Seed Balls. Inc., a company whose product is – well – obvious, speaks of early records of Egyptians using such methods to cultivate land along the Nile River. The balls were used for many reasons – for ease of broadcast and also because such seeds could be protected until conditions were right for germination. The Nile, like most rivers, was prone to erosion and the balls helped to keep seed in place, as did the plant roots that subsequently grew.



*Seed ball germinating. Photo: SEED-BALLS.COM FACEBOOK PAGE.*

In the 1700s West African slaves were ordered to use seed balls in the Carolinas for the cultivation of rice. The balls contained rice seed, red clay, and a mixture of soils. The plantation owners' intent was to protect the seed from flood, insects, and birds, and it was reported that this ancient technique was successful in producing a healthy rice crop.

In the 1970s Green Guerrilla groups gave new life to Fukuoka's practice of seed bombs. These garden guerrillas were made up of horticulturalists, botanists, gardeners, and planners who sought to transform abandoned lots and empty parcels in New York City into green spaces. Some of the more militant participants tossed what became known as "seed grenades" into property to which they had no legal rights.

The internet is rich with international examples of guerrilla gardeners who sought to make former railroad rights-of-way green by employing seed bombs. Some were sanctioned activities while others were more militant.

The whole idea of guerilla gardening is clearly not new. In the 1600s the English Diggers advocated communal land ownership for agrarian purposes in a clearly antiestablishment approach. And the 1790s and early 1800s the American Johnny Appleseed (John Chapman) wandered through the land planting orchards in large parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Johnny was prone to evangelism as part of his messaging.

Numerous US cities have created community gardens for planting vegetables by repurposing abandoned lots and forming

green spaces. Many organizations have adopted these spaces, transforming them into small, sustainable farming lots.



*CU and WheatonArts Volunteers planted and have maintained this rain garden of native plants at WheatonArts.*

The idea of common green spaces or assigned lots on the outskirts of small towns

in Europe is not unheard of; this commune concept dates back to the 1100s. Rowhomes in a town sometimes have a deeded small farmette outside the village itself as part of their property ownership. In fact the formation of bastides, a social-engineering idea developed in France in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, mandated such agricultural parcels, called "casals," around the perimeter of the village square and its encircling houses so that the homeowners could grow their own food and sell the excess under the halle to pay their taxes. Today these areas, called Cazals, are seen outside many former and current bastide villages in the French southwest. Mirepoix and Carcassonne are two famous bastides which still remain.



*Left: The half-timbered houses surround the central square and halle at Mirepoix, France. The tradition of a weekly market continues to this day.*

*Right: CU member Leslie Ficaglia with her dog Jean-Fi, working a farmette in France that's part of her property on the outskirts of her town. It's part of the city plan dating back hundreds of years.*

*Photos: J. Morton Galetto*

Currently the trend, when not agriculturally driven, is to introduce native plants for

flower gardens. Natives take less care, promote pollination, and support local natural communities of plants and animals.

I'm not sure when the statute of limitations runs out for mischief but I once employed seed as revenge. I was in my early teens when a property owner in my neighborhood, who had the most perfect of lawns, took a pot shot at my dog.

The homeowner's lawn was zoysia, an incredibly tough turf that he manicured with everything but tweezers. If you dared to set foot on the grass its strength held you aloft. And if you walked on it he hollered to get off of his property. He used to burn it annually. There was not one weed.

Back in the '60s it was common for dogs to go unleashed in neighborhoods. And my dog dared to wander on to his precious grass one day when I went over to a neighbor's for a snack. As I exited I saw him inside his open garage holding a gun aimed at my dog; this was long before he could have been influenced by the actions of homeland security.

I yelled, "Stop, mister, that's my dog!" but he shot anyway. He must have missed because my dog had no reaction, although he was clearly baffled by the noise.

We left, my dog and I. But we hatched a plan. My dog was my best friend and we discussed everything together, good and bad, so together it was decided that I would swing a bag of bird seed all over his lawn. Unfortunately, when I carried out the plan, he caught me and the chase was on. I ran for two and a half blocks and into the back yard of a property where I jumped a fence. I heard his pants get torn as he tried to hurtle after me, then a number of utterances not worthy of repeating here spewed from his mouth.

I made it one block further into a wooded lot where I lay down with my dog for what felt like hours before I ventured home.

I did learn a few things: that when you are scared you can run much faster than you ever thought possible, and that a Kerry Blue Terrier behind you can really trip up a would-be-assailant. I also learned that revenge generally backfires.

So if you want to toss seed bombs my advice is to think out your plan and wear stretch pants and PF Flyers. Whatever the outcome, it won't be as nasty as what our nations do with armaments.

May your garden grow!

**Sources**

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"On Guerrilla Gardening: A handbook for Gardening without Boundaries," Richard Reynolds, (2014).

Seed Balls, Inc. website.

"The Real Johnny Appleseed," Heinz History Center.com

**Notes**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla\\_gardening](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_gardening)