



# The Mobile Garden

*About Berlin sprouts, Kreuzberger kraut and Princess beans*

Call it the continuing story of the global urban garden movement that has been invading our city landscapes and was featured in our last issue. But also consider this little piece of writing as an antidote to most Berliners’ growing scepticism that the German capital’s urban development is exclusively entwined with the euro and the dollar bill. What follows is a small token about a different green, where a new class of citizens imagine a better - temporary - future for their city by turning ugly-looking wasteland into a veggie garden where some of the local hedonists can stay as cool as a cucumber.

text WALTER BETTENS





Previous spread:  
**The Princess gardens in summer**  
Photo © Marco Clausen

This spread:  
**The Princess gardens in November**  
Photos © Walter Bettens

It was in the early summer of 2009 that Nomadisch Grün (Nomadic Green) - spearheaded by Robert Shaw and Marco Clausen - put their eyes on a vacant lot at the Moritzplatz in the heart of Kreuzberg with the idea of transforming the piece of wasteland into a little urban garden adventure, aiming to cultivate their own crops of lettuce and cabbages. It wasn't about guerrilla green - the place being officially leased from the legal owner for a monthly €2300 - and with a little help from their friends, neighbours and the available voluntary squad of dreamers, fools and activists, the site - which had been a dump for over half a century in the shadow of the Berlin Wall - was cleared of all the rubbish and debris.

#### A Garden Circus

Their pilot project - baptised Prinzessinnengarten (Princess gardens) - promptly became a summer haven for young families and other soup lovers from the area, linking urban and ecological ideals to a simple social and nutritious dimension. The set-up fitted perfectly

into their scheme of temporarily transforming vacant construction sites - such as abandoned car parks and vacant rooftops - into urban farmland and green meeting places. The kind of place where your local couch potato instantly becomes a cement gardener, a Facebook friend, a die-hard vegetarian, or a mix of the above. The Prinzessinnengarten is basically a mobile garden of transportable organic vegetable plots, consisting of locally produced herbs and vegetables raised in compost beds without the use of pesticides or any other artificial substance: where a cabbage grows out of a portable plastic bag or beds of thyme and rosemary are sown in recycled tetra-bricks. There's even a honey cooperation with a fellow beekeeper. In other words, a green spot around the corner where young and old are pushing wheelbarrows around to seed and weed or just to play and have fun. As Shaw explains: 'It's a mean-while-use project. Like a moving circus we are kind of experts for temporary gardens. If the property is going to be sold, we'll move on to another place. Though we

are willing to move, we still try to leave something behind, in the sense of empowerment.'

And as it turns out, there are several advantages of a mobile garden. When it tends to become too dry in the long, hot summer, just find yourself a shady spot under a willow a few yards away to cool down your delicate tomatoes. Or what if your barking pumpkins get surprised by the big freeze on an early winter's day, just give your wheelbarrows a push and create some space for them in the tool shed. As Clausen comments on the next locomotion to avoid the usual harmful winter effects: 'We are now moving into the Eisenbahnmarkthalle, an old covered market not so far from here in Kreuzberg and will be back at the Moritzplatz in early spring.' Their basic ideal is to occupy as much space as available in big cities to let new green spaces bloom, where local citizens are able to produce fresh healthy food, helping to create more sustainable livelihoods - and slurp minestrone together.

#### Urban Utopia

And so what if the project may seem a bit 'amateur hour' - intended or not - the Prinzessinnengarten is a good reminder of how small-scale interventions can stimulate active citizenship in your local neighbourhood and can - hopefully - act as a dangling carrot to trigger more initiatives. A utopia of new urban dream weavers knitting communities together in their local garden of Eden, to work and relax, to discuss and share, to learn and digest the fruits of their own labour. As a moral support to all the urban farmers of the world, the Prinzessinnengarten (Nomadisch Grün) was recently granted the Jury and Public Prize at the Utopia-Awards 2010. Heading for yet another destination, take the honey and run. #

[www.prinzessinnengarten.net](http://www.prinzessinnengarten.net)

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