





GARDEN GROW

— With most people still feeling a greater urge to spend time outdoors following the coronavirus lockdowns, a growing number are turning to their backyards and home gardens as a place to relax and unwind. Gardening has been a hot topic on social media for some time now - as the British gardener and influencer Amy Shore is well aware.

Looking at Amy's garden on Instagram is a quick way to lift your spirits. You only need to watch the chickens trotting around or spot the twisted giant squash that Amy hangs around her neck. "It's called a tromboncino," she says with the friendly smile that her 110,000 followers frequently see in her reels and stories. Today, though, she is sitting at her desk in her house in Norfolk, East Anglia: "I checked on the chickens ten minutes ago, like I always do after finishing work." She has eleven of them at home and keeps two breeds: Cream Legbar and Pekin Bantam. When Amy refers to her work, she doesn't mean her social media presence. Gardening is merely her hobby – and she prefers it that way. She loves losing herself in her green oasis, because she can quickly leave behind all the stresses and strains of her full-time job, which mostly involves sitting in front of a computer. As a researcher, she collects data on the user-friendliness of digital services, "everything from opening a bank account to ordering train tickets."



CONCRETE EVERYWHERE

Amy is less analytical outside of her job, especially when it comes to gardening. "Sometimes I wake up in the morning, and it comes to me there and then: I know what I'm going to do that day and what I'm going to post photos of." In keeping with her handle, "chicksandveg," most of her activities revolve around radishes, tomatoes, pumpkins, and squashes, as well as her eleven hens, of course. Flowers are another of Amy's passions: "The garden is bursting with color. I want my garden to feel full and every inch to be covered. Above all, I want a space where lots is going on." Her main fan base is the relatively young audience on Instagram. Amy believes that gardening has been discovered by a new generation – one that couldn't be more different than the stereotype of retirees with plenty of time on their hands. Young people want to try things out and combine creativity with working outdoors. It's this desire that has fueled the boom in trends such as urban gardening and self-sufficiency.

The fact that Amy's garden looks so beautiful today is primarily due to the woeful state she found it in. "My real passion for gardening started when we moved here in

SUMMERTIME



For Amy, summer means flowers and lots of colors. She regularly posts tips on how to care for perennials and annuals.





A place to relax. Amy has created a retreat in the middle of her bountiful garden.

SOWING JOY



Amy is always trying to grow new types of vegetables or flowers in her greenhouse. She believes that only a garden gives you the opportunity to really experiment.



»I want my garden to feel full and to be a space where lots is going on.«

AMY SHORE



2017,” she explains. “Back then, the garden was a complete mess.” Concrete and gravel were everywhere, an old shed sat in the corner, and virtually nothing was green. “We had to do something about it anyway,” Amy says. Gradually, the view turned from gray to green. At the same time, she began recording the individual stages of the renewal in her Instagram stories: “I treated it like a diary, an opportunity to document what I had learned and what hadn’t worked.”

THE PANDEMIC DROVE THE BOOM

Her work seemed to be attracting a great deal of interest, with several hundred users initially liking videos of the renovation. Amy’s community was slowly growing. Then the pandemic came, and things really got going. The first lockdowns alone saw her audience shoot up. “In the past



DELICIOUS HARVEST



Peppers, chilies, and carrots. Amy loves conjuring up delicious dishes using the wide range of vegetables from her garden. She shares the recipes on her channel, of course.



»Everything I do
can be done
by anyone else.«

AMY SHORE





Galvanized metal beds can be found all over the garden. They are both practical and robust.



INSPIRATION FROM THE COMMUNITY

However, the global trend toward creating a private green oasis only partly explains the success of Amy's channel. She puts it like this: "I think my content gives people a form of escape. It's probably the mix of tips and tricks. Essentially, though, it's about attractive garden photos." She engages with the community to get inspiration for new videos or tutorials that people would like to see. Unlike the members of other fandoms on social media, gardening enthusiasts seem to be a very friendly bunch. "I've never had any really negative comments on Instagram," she says. "Just people pointing out things I could do better."

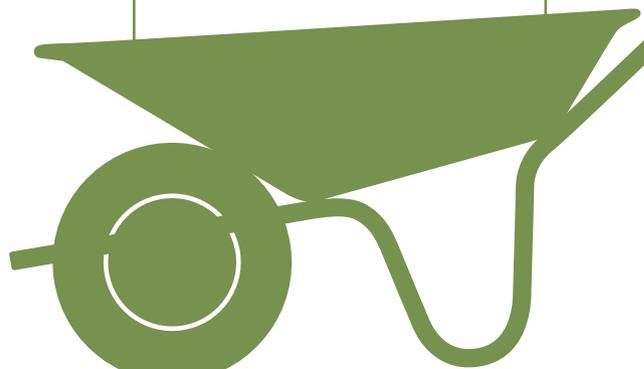
What are her followers most interested in? Amy thinks for a moment. "I get the most questions about planning ahead. What do I sow when?"

20 months, I've gone from 30,000 to 40,000, and then more than 100,000 followers." Amy still finds it hard to believe, although she knows the boom didn't come out of nowhere. A number of surveys back her up. More than half of the people interviewed by Geisenheim University in Germany stated that their garden became more important to them in 2020. A similar finding was made in 2021 by a joint international study conducted by organizations including Technical University of Munich, the University of Melbourne, and the University of California. Out of 3,700 gardeners surveyed, 75 percent said that their garden was hugely significant for them during the early stage of the pandemic. "Contact with nature," "relaxation," and "exercise" were three of the most frequently mentioned things that people were looking for in their own green spaces. Enthusiasm for growing food at home also increased in this period, with researchers pointing to the healing effects of a garden.

EGG-CELLENT



Amy's chickens are more than just a hobby to her. That's why her gardening tips are often accompanied by useful information on the right way to look after these feathered friends.



Several years ago, Amy launched an Instagram channel to document her progress as a gardener in the form of a diary.



What plants fill seasonal gaps? Things like that.” If a harvest fails or seeds don’t sprout, Amy is always open about it. That’s an important principle of hers, along with the idea that “everything I do or grow can be done by anyone else.”



YOU CAN FIND
ALL OF AMY SHORE'S
STORIES AND TIPS
ON HER CHANNEL,
"CHICKSANDVEG"
[INSTAGRAM.COM/
CHICKSANDVEG/](https://www.instagram.com/chicksandveg/)



QUALITY IS KEY

When Amy pots seedlings, arranges flowers, or digs up beds, she often makes do with a small number of garden tools. “I can do a lot with my hands,” she says. But when it comes to trimming hedges or pruning trees, she’s glad to have some electric assistance. Conveniently, her husband is a professional arborist. “I actually used his STIHL chainsaw to make a flowerpot out of wood. Otherwise, I can usually get by with my electric hedge trimmers.” Amy has also noticed something about the boom in equipment sales that has accompanied the resurgence in gardening. “There is a major trend toward high-quality tools. People who have invested time and money in their gardens want things that last.” Her next long-lasting purchase is likely to be a leaf blower with a shredder.

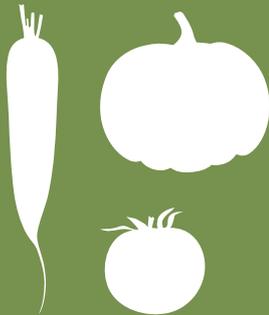
But, as always, she will take it as it comes – just like her next Instagram story. Amy doesn’t want to make a career out of social media. She just likes doing what gives her pleasure, and if other people like it too, that’s great. She has a simple message for anyone thinking of trying their hand at gardening: “Just make a start. Planting something in a bed in your garden or in a few pots can open the door to much bigger things.”

AMY'S GARDENING TIPS



GROW WHAT YOU LIKE EATING.

Many people try growing all sorts of vegetables, but then don't enjoy harvesting and eating them. Think about what you'd like to grow, taste things, and buy seeds accordingly.



SUGAR SNAP PEAS

are a must for me. I just love them.

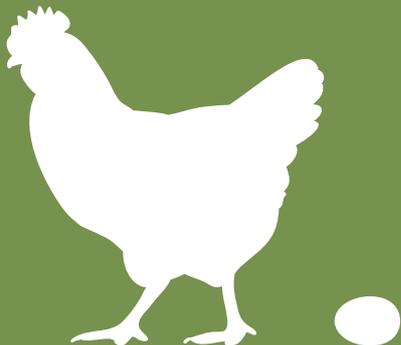


CREATE VARIETY!

Growing flowers as well as vegetables is wonderful. Not only are flowers pretty and very colorful, they also attract pollinators and bees.



CHICKENS are social animals. Three is a good number to start with, so that they don't feel alone. Make sure they have enough space.



COLORS ARE JOYFUL.

The more colorful your garden, the more beautiful it is. This year, I had almost 50 varieties of dahlias in one bed, along with asters, snapdragons, and scabiosa.

