

# THE NEW BLOOM ECONOMY

The houseplant explosion in the pandemic was only the beginning. Now comes a wave of new stores and brands looking to take advantage.



Arber (above and right) urges people to move away from using chemicals in their gardens.

Deborah Choi (left) runs plant-care platform Horticulture, while Miri Cervantes (below) is behind Vienna plant shop Calienna.

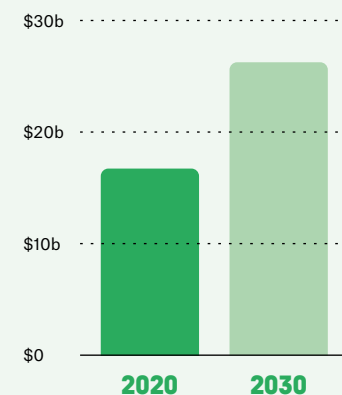


Keeping plants alive can be challenging, so much so that it prevented most people from keeping their homes crammed with them until recently. In 2020, a survey found that half of British millennials had no plants because they didn't know how to care for them, with 22% saying the anxiety came from having killed one in the past.

However, lockdowns have supercharged demand for houseplants – and supporting this market growth has led to a massive sub-industry in plant-care products. The US Census Bureau says Americans spent \$8.5 billion more on gardening-related items in 2020 than in 2019, a rise of nearly 20%.

The average UK adult owns seven indoor plants; for Gen Z, it's closer to 10. To cater to this demand, established brands are branching out into new product ranges, while younger ones are also taking on the challenge.

Londoner Nick Jackson and his dad, Richard, launched online business Plantsmith in 2020 as a response to the poor selection of houseplant products at garden centers in their area. Today they focus on orchid feed, leaf mists, bug-control sprays and tonics, none of which would look out of place in a design store.



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### NEEM TEAM

In late 2019, Mother Co Plants, a tropical and cacti specialist store in Minneapolis, launched a range of natural in-house fertilizers, neem oil (a natural pesticide) and foliar sprays (fertilizer for leaves) in frosted-glass tincture bottles. The business' bags of dirt, pure

# SEVEN

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF INDOOR PLANTS OWNED BY UK ADULTS; FOR THOSE IN GEN Z, IT'S CLOSER TO 10.

pumice and topsoil desert rock – sourced, printed and packed by hand in the US – are as covetable as the merchandise. Without storage space to stash giant bags of soil and unsightly watering cans, people in cramped urban apartments want tidy toolkits that please the eye as well as care for their colocasia.

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Investors are equally confident this sector will continue to flourish. Ugao, a gardening brand in the Indian city of Pune, sells an extensive range of plant-care brands and supplies. The business raised \$2 million in November 2021. Sproutl

is the Farfetch of garden supplies, not least because it was launched by Anni Noel-Johnson and Andy Done, former executives at the online fashion brand. It raised \$9 million in July 2021.

### ROOTS IN THE SKY

Former fifth-grade teacher Maryah Greene never expected to make horticultural guidance her main source of income, but things blew up in 2019 when she began offering advice to clients for money and launched Greene Piece, an Instagram account of tips and tricks. Now she earns a living as a plant doctor, consultant and stylist, and her blooming Brooklyn-based brand is hitting pause on new clients to expand its team.

Breaking down the barriers to access and knowledge has been an essential part of the plant-care boom, with online plant shops such as Patch swapping opaque Latin terms for shorter, memorable forenames such as Monty (AKA *ficus longifolia*).

'Offer as much help and guidance as you can to your customers,' says former flight attendant Jane Fear, who co-owns Pointless Plants with ex-pilot Nathan Raab. 'The more you know, the more they'll want to come and buy from you.'

It's not only customers who fret about keeping their houseplants healthy. 'As a retailer, you'll find that some die as you're waiting to sell them, or won't be fit for on-site sale requirements,' says Jane. Rather than dispose of their ailing alocasias and mottled monkey masks, the pair developed Perfectly Imperfect Plants, a section of the site for slightly damaged, but revivable, flora.

While greenery in our living spaces is beneficial for our physical and mental health, the traditional lawn and garden industry is at odds with the values of many ethically minded people. When the founder of plant wellness brand Arber, Vanessa Dawson, decided to use natural foods, beauty products and cleaning supplies in her home, she was

**20%**  
The increase in US spend on gardening-related items in 2020 from 2019 – that's a huge \$8.5 billion more.

shocked to find that non-toxic options for her plants and garden weren't available.

### CHEMICAL REACTION

'Almost everything was made from harmful synthetic chemicals, and no one was offering the customer safety, efficacy and education,' says Vanessa, who lives in LA County. She designed Arber to help people move away from chemically intense gardening and to aesthetically complement green spaces.

Having gained \$1.5 million in early-stage venture capital investment, next up for Arber is a carbon-offsetting soil health line, and new products to serve larger customers with landscape gardens and sports facilities. 'We want to become the leading plant wellness brand, encouraging more gardeners to dig in and grow a better world,' she says. 'The products we use have a direct impact on waterways, soil health and planet health, and everybody's plot counts as we work to growing a better world.'

### WHEN WELLNESS MEETS HOUSEPLANTS

It's not only plant-care brands taking advantage of the rising appreciation of houseplants. Take the wellness industry. Increasingly, businesses in this sector are putting plants front and center of everything they do. In 2021, Figaro Apothecary was the first luxury lifestyle brand to champion wellbeing through natural products that harness botanicals, and since then many new brands have popped up in this space.