

PURSUITS

BY VINDHYA
BURUGUPALLI

Sowing Seeds of Repose

Executives ground themselves in the tactile and tranquil practice of gardening.

It's a warm evening, and after coming home from a long day of work, Jeff Bernhard goes—as he does most days—straight to the garden, where he inhales deeply, breathing in the petrichor of damp soil and the sweet tang of blooming tomato plants. The day's tensions instantly begin to ease. The 53-year-old chief executive of ReviveHealth, a virtual healthcare platform, started gardening seven years ago as a way to slow the pace of his demanding, on-the-go lifestyle after his wife staged an intervention. Early on, the self-described “city slicker” killed most of his plants, before eventually getting the hang of it. After that first good harvest, he was hooked.

These days, Bernhard, known to his fans as the Executive Gardener, is endeavoring to spread the seeds of his new hobby to other hard-charging types. On his YouTube channel, which has more



than 66,000 subscribers, the white-collar green thumb teaches his viewers the how-tos of not just cultivating but also preserving and preparing their own homegrown produce. As a healthcare executive, he shares about his journey to better health through diet—and about what a difference in flavor there is between store-bought

and garden-fresh tomatoes!

Gardening, along with a number of other nostalgic hobbies, experienced a comeback in the early days of the pandemic. In 2020, consumer spending on home and garden products doubled from the previous year, according to a report by the retail research start-up Future

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Commerce. But unlike other pandemic trends that fell to the wayside as the months dragged on, experts say gardening is going strong, with some sellers claiming to have sold more seeds last spring than any year prior. One study found that the majority of respondents plan to do even more planting this year than last. As the ground thaws and the summer draws people back outdoors, the garden seems to offer the promise of renewal.

For many, tillage has served as a source of literal grounding during a time of immense uncertainty. Bernhard often hears people express that they want to be more self-reliant, get back to basics.

A garden can be planted anywhere: in the backyard, on a balcony, even in Pittsburgh, which Bernhard calls home. It's the ideal hobby for busy execs, too, since it doesn't involve travel time and can fit into the cracks of the most tightly packed schedule. Perhaps most alluring is that the results are tangible and edible: “You can taste it, look at it,” Bernhard says.

Studies actually show that tactile feedback physiologically soothes the nerves. “Just looking at a plant changing its color, shape, and size in our environment subconsciously brings great joy,” says Raavi Chandrasekhar, a horticulture scientist. He explains that nurturing greenery

cultivates patience and perseverance, which helps ease feelings of frustration and anxiety. Bernhard is himself a testament to the healing power of plants.

But the Executive Gardener is more comfortable drawing parallels between the garden and the C-suite. While it's tempting to tackle everything at once, instead he advises focusing on one task at a time. Start small. Grow slowly. Deliberately. “The biggest mistake new gardeners make is planting too much,” he says. But as in business, it's important to diversify: “When you try numerous things, one might be a big hitter ... or the new big revenue-driving product.”

THE ART OF

Curating a Playlist

Music may be the ultimate purveyor of mood. Almost any experience can be accentuated with a strategically synchronized soundtrack. But beware: a poorly chosen tune can also kill the vibe, which is why you should never leave playlist making to the algorithms.

- 1 Identify the purpose:** Need to amp yourself up in the morning? Or is the goal to make feel-good memories singing along on the open highway?
- 2 Diversify but harmonize:** Flow one song into the next but keep it fresh with various artists, genres, and time periods. Tune in to transitions.
- 3 Set the tone:** Always kick it off with a track to hook listeners. The second song affirms the tone. From there, follow your instinct.
- 4 Refine and refresh:** A playlist is a living collection that, when tended to, can span a lifetime. Keep adding, subtracting, and following the beat wherever it leads.

