

Home Is Where the Everything Is

Authors of forthcoming lifestyle books share lessons learned in the pandemic year

By LELA NARGI

For many Americans, home has become office—and school, and sole source of meals and activities, and more—since the pandemic has taken hold, creating a surge in home improvement spending, gardening, and houseplant purchases.

Little surprise, then, that books about these topics also have gotten a boost. Gardening titles spiked almost 45% in 2020 compared with 2019, per NPD BookScan, as readers gravitated toward self-sufficiency and eco-conscious pursuits. House and home titles saw a rise of 7.5%, led by big names in organizing (Clea Shearer and Joanna Teplin, *The Home Edit* and *The Home Edit Life*), decorating (Joanna Gaines, *Homebody*), and decluttering (Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*).

Forthcoming books continue in this vein. Some were in the works when the pandemic hit; others responded to it. Many seek to help readers create what *Design a Healthy Home* author Oliver Heath calls “more productive, happier, and healthier spaces to live and work in.”

Embrace your space

Joanna Thornhill, an interior stylist in London, received first edits on *The New Mindful Home* (Laurence King, Apr.) as the world was shutting down. Still, she says, the manuscript read as “so relevant to now.”

Mindful of current conditions, Thornhill—whose previous books include 2019’s presciently titled *My Bedroom Is an Office*—eliminated a section on communal crafting. But otherwise, her book, which *PW*’s review called a “practical guide” to “creating a calming space,” seemed more necessary than ever. Even those with modest means, she says, can make interminable hours at home more bearable by adding wall color to compensate for a lack of outside stimulation, and lighting candles to signal that the home office has morphed into a meditation room for the evening.

Thornhill also includes a chapter on biophilic design—incorporating the innate human attraction to nature—as does Justina Blakeney in *Jungalow* (see our q&a with Blakeney, “Changing the View,” p. 26). Oliver Heath, meanwhile, devotes all of *Design a*



ILLUSTRATION BY SUBADA / DEPOSITPHOTO.COM

Healthy Home to the concept of connecting home with nature.

Heath, a British sustainability architect whose company caters to corporate clients including Unilever and Deutsche Bank, presents 100 ideas for naturalistic home design. Number one is all about color, and choosing hues “that remind us of nature” (the soft blues of calm skies; yellows for the welcoming energy of sunflowers). Number 16: move your desk next to a window to “maximise exposure to natural light and notice seasonal changes.”

In *The Humane Home* (Princeton Architectural Press, Apr.), Sarah Lozanova imagines her readers seeking a “green life” in order to exist in harmony with nature, as she writes in an opening chapter that touches on downsizing, decluttering, and aiming small. She has loftier aims thereafter, including water conservation and waste reduction.



Lozanova says that lately, actions that support a sustainable home and planet have “become appealing options,” and the trade is taking notice. Thornhill agrees, adding that sustainable design was still considered fringe a few years ago, but the pandemic has “brought people up to speed.”

Keep it simple

With Covid-related supply chain shortages still an issue, now might be a good time to embrace minimalism, suggests Stéphanie Mandréa, cofounder of Canadian eco-products company Dans le sac. While cooped up at home, why not learn to waste less, clean better, and shop in bulk to reduce your carbon footprint?

Minimal (trans. from the French by J.C. Sutcliffe, Ambrosia, Apr.), which Mandréa wrote with Dans le sac cofounder Laurie Barrette, offers familiar guidance in this department alongside recipes for food, and home and beauty products, which, Mandrea says, have the added allure of giving the family projects to tackle together (e.g., making candles).

Home & Garden Books

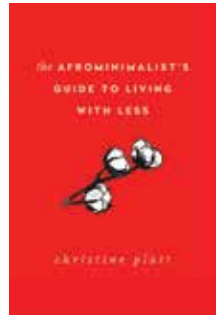
Yumiko Sekine, founder of Japanese lifestyle brand Fog Linen Work, is also a fan of projects “you can do while you’re stuck at home.” She and coauthor Jenny Wapner wrote *Simplicity at Home* (photos by Nao Shimizu, Chronicle, out now) before Covid hit, but its nonconsumerist bent speaks to the moment. “Many people are nesting by necessity during the pandemic,” Wapner says, and “many are also struggling financially.” She says the book presents “economical, and often free, ways to organize and beautify”—weaving place mats from old sheets, for example—and encourages readers to pare down possessions to the most essential.

Other spring titles are in accord with this notion. “The less you have in your home, the less you need to do,” writes professional organizer Dilly Carter in *Create Space* (DK, Mar.). Carter, whom the BBC called “London’s Marie Kondo,” gives decluttering a room-by-room spin, walking readers from bedroom and bathroom to office, kids’ rooms, and shared spaces, in a series of chapters that begin with “chaos” and end with “calm.” She punctuates her how-tos with sufficient checklists and Kondo-esque

shirt-folding diagrams to occupy many a bored afternoon.

For lawyer, historian, and social activist Christine Platt, minimalism is personal—“rooted in my authenticity and intentions as a Black woman,” she says. She’s a longtime practitioner, but the advent of Covid, which spurred *The Afrominimalist’s Guide to Living with Less* (Tiller, June), added urgency.

“Now that people are home for 24 hours a day for weeks at a time, it’s impossible for them not to acknowledge their overconsumption and clutter,” Platt says. “It’s impossible to not only see how their living spaces aren’t functional, but also feel it.” Using stories from her life and her progression into minimalism, she instructs readers in the principles, process, and practice of letting go, in order to make room for what matters.



Is it Fresh, or is it Felt?



Learn to make felt plants and flowers so rich with detail; they look freshly picked!

Incorporate beauty

No author *PW* spoke with suggests that living with less means living without greenery—Platt, for one, said in a 2020 blog post that she believes in having “less (except for books and plants),” and Sekine and Wapner’s *Simplicity at Home* depicts serene rooms accented by glass-jarred cuttings.

Washington farmer Erin Benzakein makes her living bringing flora to the masses. She’s also the author of 2017’s *Floret Farm’s Cut Flower Garden* and 2020’s *Floret Farm’s A Year in Flowers*, which have sold a combined 129,000 print copies, per BookScan, and spawned a line of calendars and other paper products. In *Floret Farm’s Discovering Dahlias* (with Jill Jorgensen and Julie Chai, photos by Chris Benzakein, Chronicle, Mar.), she details how to grow, harvest, overwinter, propagate, and design with the colorful blooms, presenting activities to see enforced homebodies through many seasons.

“Spending time in nature and the garden is incredibly grounding and calming,” Benzakein says. “So many families grew a garden together for the very first time in 2020.”

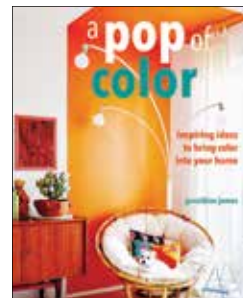
Tending flora is also an indoor pursuit, one that Hilton Carter, a plant stylist with 461,000 Instagram



followers, encourages in *Wild Creations* (Ryland Peters & Small, Apr.).

Carter started work on the book two months into the pandemic, when he already knew “so many of us would want to feel connected to nature,” he says, “and also the gratification of being nurturing.” He offers instructions for terrariums, air plant wreaths, and DIY planters, along with care tips to minimize frustration for newbies. Aware that sourcing tools and materials would be challenging at various points during lockdown, he made sure to include materials that could be found online or around the house.

Adding houseplants and flowers are among the many easy, low-commitment ways to brighten a home with *A Pop of Color* (Ryland Peters & Small, Mar.), according to interiors expert Geraldine James, whose previous books include 2020’s *#Shelfie* and who has worked for major British retailers including Selfridges. A bold accent wall, for instance, might serve as a mental vacation for the travel-starved, as it can “create a sense of another country or climate.”



Designer Corey Damen Jenkins, a veteran of HGTV’s

Changing the View

PW talks with Justina Blakeney



Los Angeles interior designer Justina Blakeney has built up her following—1.4 million on her largest Instagram account alone—through an exuberant embrace of color, a love of foliage and natural materials, and by opening up about her life experiences as a Black woman. She’s the author of three titles (Abrams, all): 2015’s *The New Bohemians*, 2017’s *The New Bohemian Handbook*, and as of April, *Jungalow*, named for her lifestyle brand. She spoke with *PW* about the ways in which the pandemic has changed what people need and expect from their homes, and how that shift is helping feed the democratization of the design industry.



What are your readers seeking under the current circumstances?

The way we’re living during the pandemic is so intense and difficult, and we’re using our homes in very different ways. Right now, I’m in a makeshift home office in the TV room. In the evenings, I close my work area down, which is an important marker. We need our spaces to be multifunctional; you might need to turn your living room into a yoga studio or have an impromptu dance party with your kids. Flexibility is key.

You devote an entire chapter to bringing the outdoors inside—why is that important now?

Reconnecting with nature is a big part of my brand and ethos. All the things I

Home & Garden Books



Showhouse Showdown, also favors the bold. In his first book, *Design Remix* (Rizzoli, Mar.), he nods to the pandemic, writing that “savvy interior decoration can be a vaccine for cabin fever.” He shares anecdotes about surviving the 2008 recession in his hometown of Detroit, urges readers toward “fearless” creativity, and professes the belief that “winters go faster when you are surrounded by great, bold design.”

Creativity and nostalgia also infuse Beata Heuman’s bright, energetic *Every Room Should Sing* (Rizzoli, Mar.). Though the designer began plotting the book in early 2020, “I didn’t start writing till the first proper lockdown, so I was quite aware of making it tie in well with everything that was going on,” she says.

Growing up isolated in rural Sweden, Heuman was “perched” for a life in lockdown and “always thought home should encompass everything you need, so you could stay there and be cozy.” She pushes readers to explore their own personas for inspiration, a design philosophy she feels is perpetually relevant, pandemic or no.

Ultimately, Heuman notes, Covid has made everyone “more aware of home and the value it has.” That awareness will remain, she and other authors say, even after some semblance of normalcy resumes. ■



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already felt—we should invite nature into our homes more, we need more natural light and fresh air and plants—are exacerbated in the context of staying home. It’s more important than ever to create a home that feels healthy and supports wellbeing, whether it’s through bringing in houseplants, or textiles that give the sensation of the calm rhythm of the ocean—these can regenerate you in the same way going into nature can.

What are some common stumbling blocks to creating a more livable space?

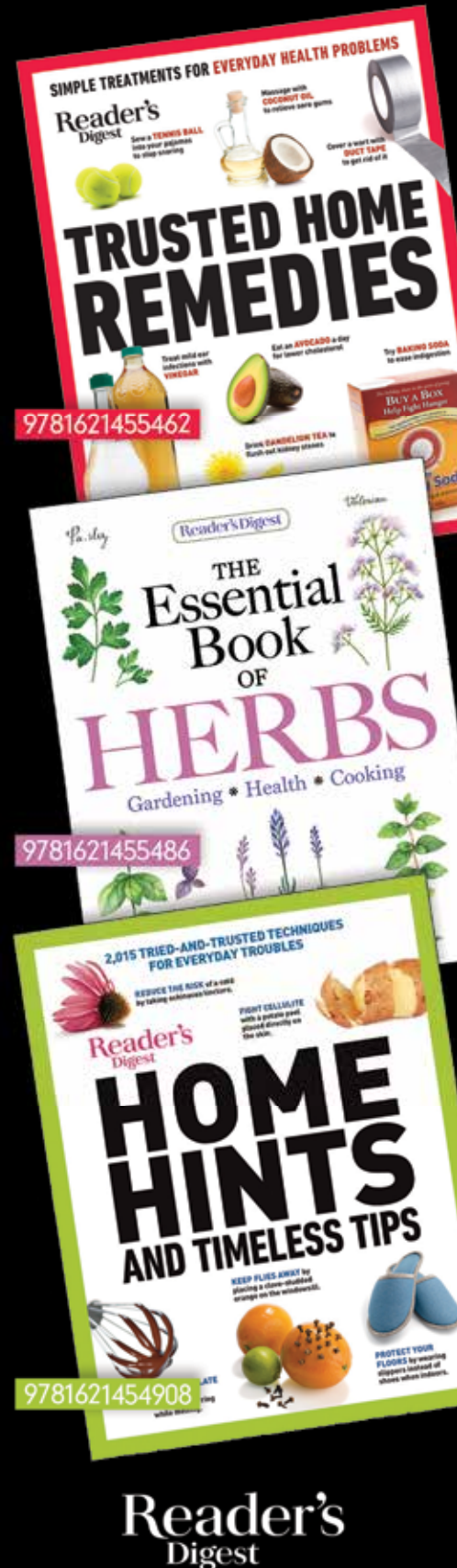
I see people struggling with home decor; we were all sick of our homes before and now we’re staring at the walls and can’t leave. I also recognize that people become paralyzed when it comes to home decor choices. They don’t want to buy the wrong sofa because it’s an investment of thousands of dollars. But you can restyle a bookshelf or switch out a sconce. If you’re bored, try putting the sofa on a different wall—it’ll change the view, and you’ll notice different things out the window. There are so many things you can do to change the way a space feels.

Do you see this DIY ethos opening up the design industry?

The design industry has historically been exclusive and snobby, which is a barrier to entry. Sure, you can get a beautiful home if you’re wealthy, but you can also learn by trying, observing, spending time in a space. You can pick up a book to hold your hand through the process. I felt like an outsider in the design industry for so long—being a woman of color and navigating so many spaces where there were no other POC in the room. I hope telling my story might inspire people to dig into their own roots as well, to think about how to design their homes, find their histories and lineages, using their homes as a way to connect with family and ancestors and memories.

—L.N.

Time-Tested HOME & GARDEN SOLUTIONS from Reader’s Digest



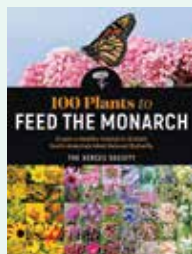
Feed Yourself, Feed the Planet

For a variety of pandemic-related reasons—failing supply chains, self-imposed lockdowns, and, in many cases, reduced incomes—increasing numbers of Americans have started growing their own produce. At the same time, renewed interest in the natural world has ushered in a wave of enthusiasm for protecting the planet. New titles show that gardens can sustain humans, animals, and ecosystems all at once.

100 Plants to Feed the Monarch

Xerces Society. Storey, Apr.

Invertebrate conservation organization Xerces Society offers home gardeners guidance in nurturing the familiar orange-and-black pollinators: choosing pesticide-free nurseries; sourcing milkweed, the insects' primary forage plant; timing tasty blooms to match monarchs' migration calendar; and more. "These eye-opening tips," *PW's* review said, "will appeal to both seasoned conservationists and those new to the cause."



The Ecological Gardener

Matt Rees-Warren. Chelsea Green, May

The author, former head gardener at Kilver Court Gardens in the U.K., assists readers in reconsidering the way they garden—from the ground up. By following earth-supporting practices, such as boosting essential soil microorganisms and choosing biodiversity-building native plantings, readers can, Rees-Warren writes, "help mitigate our ecological crisis."

Gardening Hacks

Jon VanZile. Adams, Apr.

Confirmed black thumbs and timid would-be plantsmiths receive emotional support and environmentally friendly guidance in keeping flora alive, without investing a small fortune in supplies. VanZile, a Master Gardener in Florida who writes for outlets including the *Spruce*, offers creative, low-cost ideas (using toilet paper tubes as seed-starting containers) and advice (how to train and support vines) aimed at sparking enthusiasm and building confidence.



Grow Green

Jen Chillingworth. Quadrille, Mar.

Part practicum, part mindfulness guide, this title seeks to add intentionality to a horticulturist's essential skill set. Chillingworth, author of 2019's *Live Green* and 2020's *Clean Green*, dispenses advice and suggests projects to help readers conserve water, understand their soil, and incorporate mindful gardening habits "so they become part of our lives," she writes.

How to Garden the Low Carbon Way

Sally Nex. DK, Mar.

The author of 2017's *Growing Self-Sufficiency* turns her attention to combatting climate change via the home garden. Suggested sustainable practices include making compost, which reduces greenhouse gases generated by food scraps otherwise sent to landfills; planting hedges to filter out car emissions; and building bioswales, or channels to collect and filter rainwater.



How to Grow Your Own Food

Angela S. Judd. Adams, May

In five chapters, Judd, a Master Gardener in Arizona who has contributed to *Better Homes and Gardens*, gives instruction on generalities like choosing soil and picking the best location for crops, and the specifics of growing various herbs, fruits, and vegetables—50 in all—both inside and outdoors.

Micro Food Gardening

Jennifer McGuinness. Cool Springs, Mar.

Aspiring gardeners constricted by tiny spaces are the target readership for this project-based handbook focused on mini produce. Photos depict clever solutions—an edible side table, strawberries grown on a cake stand, microgreens nesting in a bicycle basket—for turning nearly any space into one that produces sustenance.



Planting for Wildlife

Jan Moore. Quadrille, May

In a richly illustrated compendium on "what wildlife wants" (the title of one section of the book), British horticulturist Moore offers tips on how to "reconnect with the natural world on your own doorstep," according to the publisher. Simple projects are meant to create sanctuary for invertebrates, birds, and small mammals even in the heart of a busy city.

The Vegetable Garden Pest Handbook

Susan Mulvihill. Cool Springs, Apr.

No vegetable gardener escapes attacks from unwanted visitors, whether beetle, slug, or mite. Anticipating the onslaught, Mulvihill, a Master Gardener and longtime columnist for the *Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, Wash., introduces common species of tiny food assassins, then explains the ways they can be dispatched without harming the ecosystem, including by adopting best organic practices before the insects have a chance to invade.



—L.N.