GROWERTALKS

Under an Acre

1/1/2022

Cultivating a Community of Plant Parents

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David Angelov, the owner of Plant Parenthood in Swampscott, Massachusetts, is on a mission to transform the relationship between plants and their owners.

His journey into horticulture began less than five years ago, when a gardening designer approached him to take aerial photos of different-sized beds. The photography gig resulted in a job offer, where David worked directly with the designer to create and maintain the higher-end gardens in the region.

“I fell in love with gardening and really started to appreciate that nature was here millions of years before us,” he said. “I started to open my eyes to the different plants around me, the different reasons why people plant, the structures of the garden, what makes a good garden—all of these things started to get open to me. I was just showing up to work, but little did I know that I was really building my future.”

Pictured: David Angelov, owner of Plant Parenthood in Swampscott, Massachusetts.

The company focused on indoor and outdoor plant aesthetics, including deadheading, garden maintenance and laying down boughs for a cleaner look.

“I have a hard time learning through books, so the hands-on learning that this position involved was ideal for me,” said David.

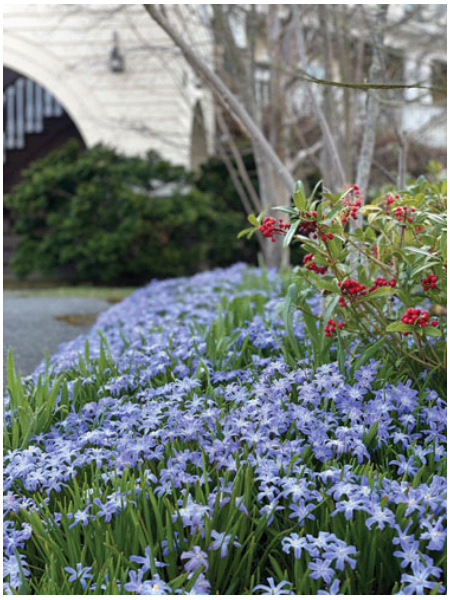
He worked directly with the designer, eventually progressing to the foreman of the crew, where he was able to put the lead designer’s ideas into action.

David became intrigued by the entire gardening process and wanted to share this newly discovered connection with

others. For him, gardening wasn't just about putting together a beautiful design, but how the plants evolved and developed throughout the years. It's this long-term process that helped him understand how the plants react when their environment changes, including wet versus dry springs, the changes in the soil and temperature shifts. He used a garden journal to capture these insights so that he could identify and understand the differences year after year. After four years working in collaboration with the lead designer, David felt confident enough to branch out on his own.

The move to develop his own design company was an extremely gradual transition, initially starting with a few clients while working at his other job part-time.

"It was a little scary stepping in and doing the back end all by myself," said David. "But I'm also very particular in the way I run my business. And moving on my own enabled me to garden better so that I could have peace of mind that I fully supported the needs of my clients and their gardens."



One of the biggest things that he wanted to alter was the relationship that customers have with their gardens. This included advocating for gardening to become a community
initiative, where those with the gardening knowledge and education would share their expertise with those that don't. By involving the entire community in the process, David hoped that it would help to strengthen the connection between people and their gardens.

Pictured: Spring starflower mixed with the red berries off the skimmia gives a lot of color contrast using perennial growth.

His mission is to transform the plant/plant owner relationship by developing an inclusive community where the members learn to appreciate nature, and their role in creating and maintaining these beautiful spaces.

"I want to teach everyone to become a plant parent," said David. "I feel that everyone should be at that level to take in a plant from a friend and be able to take care of it." The name of his company, Plant Parenthood, embodies this philosophy.

When speaking about his vision, David enthusiastically shared that his long-term goal would include a platform and an app, similar to an Airbnb model, which would connect homeowners to local gardeners.

"It is about connecting people to gardeners, which is really about connecting people to people," said David. "The community aspect of this is huge, as clients would have access to a plant specialist specific to their region that could assist them with any concerns."

At the moment, his focus is on developing this relationship with his gardening clients, beginning by inviting them to participate in maintaining their own gardens.

"They are not doing much of the heavy lifting, but it gives them the opportunity to ask any question that they want, receive an immediate answer and see how the process works," he shared.

By involving the client, David hopes that they learn about their plants and how to best attend to them. This collaborative process also helps to open the lines of communication as he works side by side with his clients to bring their vision to life.

"Working with my clients has helped them feel comfortable enough to give me feedback, which is huge because every customer is different and it's impossible to fully understand their wants and needs in one conversation," said

David.

Creating a garden for a client isn't about simply replicating a photograph that they've seen, but understanding what drew the client to those images in the first place.

"It's all about connections. It's about taking words, feelings and emotions and putting them into their garden," said David.

This includes investing the time to discover the stories and meanings of the plants that the clients have chosen and helping rebuild the connections to them.

"In Russia, for example, birch trees are a symbol of peace, and so I like to connect my Russian clients back to these roots by planting birch trees," said David.

When asked about the future, David stated that he doesn't foresee a huge expansion in his gardening portfolio, as the business model he chose is centered around developing long-term relationships with customers. Instead, he would like to develop the education portion of the business, including collaborating with other individuals who could help his vision of a gardening platform and mobile app come to life. **GT**

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