

PLANT

Persuaders

The plant passions that drive two plantfluencers — and why they matter to your business.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Along with “social distancing” and “flattening the curve,” the word “plantfluencer” was a word that entered more Americans’ vocabulary in 2020. As people hunkered down and looked for ways to draw comfort and combat feelings of isolation during the pandemic, many turned to houseplants. And to decide what to buy, how to style plants, how to incorporate them into home décor, they looked increasingly to the vibrant, dynamic communities of plant lovers of Instagram. The plantfluencers racking up remarkable followings online have diverse backgrounds and highly personal stories about the connections they feel to plants, but their messages — that plants make people feel happier and that plants are a meaningful addition to any (and every) space year round — are rallying cries for everyone in the floral industry invested in growing plant sales far beyond the pandemic period. Floral Management recently talked with two plantfluencers about their experience in the online communities and their deep, abiding passion for all things green.

COURTESY STACEY BAL

BlackPlantChick.com

THE PLANT EVANGELIST

Alika Turner

Pen Name:
Jade Harper

Instagram Handle: @blackplantchick
Instagram Followers: 18,700+

Beyond Social: Turner hosts the popular Black Plant Chick Podcast, which debuts its second season in January. She also offers plant care workshops and consultations via her website.

Floral Management: When did you become interested in plants in a big way?

Alika Turner: I am a creative and my background is in erotic storytelling — books, podcasting and videos. I hit a point in my life when I needed to pivot into something new. Around that time, I was setting up a scene for a video and I thought, “I need a pop of color — something green and alive.” I went to a big box store in Atlanta and picked up an umbrella tree and a corn plant. They looked great — at first. Then, they started looking sad. My home office only has one little window. I didn’t know how to take care of these plants. So, I started educating myself. I began posting about my plants on social media. It was an outlet for me, initially, but soon I was part of this big plant community. It’s all grown from that. At one point in the pandemic, I had 60, 70 plants in my house. I was going to a local nursery every weekend, buying three or four plants at a time. It was a place that made me feel safe.



“Find the community that speaks your language. The online plant community is big! It’s OK to jump from community to community, especially as you are learning.”

—Alika Turner

FM: How did you find your place within the many plant communities online?

AT: I started The Black Plant Chick podcast because I understood that medium, podcasting, and I thought it would be a way to talk about my journey becoming a plant parent. But it was also an opportunity for me to invite guests on and talk to people who speak my plant language. That’s something I preach all the time to people who are new to plants: Find the community that speaks your language. The online plant community IS big! It’s

OK to jump from community to community, especially as you are learning.

One thing that was shocking to me in the online plant community was seeing how many people who looked like me were thriving there. Every day, I see all of these beautiful people of color with their beautiful plants, all through my social media feed — people like Veronica Moore of Brown Skinned Plant Mama (@brownskinnedplantmama), who’s like my resident therapist, and Colah B Tawkin of Black in the Garden

(@blackinthegarden), who I consider my “soil sister,” and so many others. It is very important for me as a Black woman to keep pushing my voice so that other people of color know they are welcome in this space, too. Representation matters.

FM: How does your experience with storytelling inform your love of plants — or vice versa?

AT: For me, the podcast is just one more way to connect plants and storytelling — two things I’m very passionate about. There’s a lot of overlap. Plants need more than water and food to survive. So do people! On my podcast, talking about how I was feeling a little low and then how caring for my fiddle-leaf fern helped lift me up — that can all be a very natural progression. I’ve found that giving and receiving plants can really be a spiritual connection, too. Now that I’ve experienced how much work it takes to care for double-digit numbers of plants, I understand the energy transfer that’s happening when you give a plant to someone else — the love and care you put into keeping that plant alive, helping it thrive, all of that is still there and it’s going along to that new person, which is pretty powerful to think about. It’s a very dynamic experience.



COURTESY ALIKA TURNER

CARE TAKERS Plantfluencer Alika Turner said plants help many people express and share emotions with others.

FM: What do you think more plant enthusiasts need more of right now from the people who are growing and selling plants?

AT: Education! So many people have gotten into the business of selling plants, which on one hand is great, but people

need more than just basic information when they buy a plant. Some of my followers will tell me, “The person who sold this to me didn’t tell me anything about how to care for this!” Some plants are difficult! To be successful, people need help picking the right plant for their lifestyle.

“A lack of a green thumb stems from a lack of correct information and diligent routine care. With informed selections and an at-home maintenance schedule, anyone can be a green thumb!”

—Stacey Bal

TheFloraculturist.com

THE BORN BELIEVER

Stacey Bal

AIFD, EMC



Instagram Handle: @thefloraculturist
Instagram Followers: 7,800+

Beyond Social: Bal, a member of the Floriology Education Team, is a long-time floral designer and educator known for her workshops and video tutorials. The designer in residence at City Scents in Chicago, she recently partnered with Arthur Williams, AIFD, EMC, CPF, to write “Impermanent,” a book that explores the intersection of language and fresh botanical design.

Floral Management: You have a long history in the floral industry, but how did you become so immersed in plants specifically?

Stacey Bal: I am a second-generation, fully dedicated florist and plant expert. I was born into the plant and flower business, as my mother went to school for ornamental horticulture while I was in the womb. I followed in her footsteps and built a career around connecting with people through nature and art. My favorite jobs have all centered around greenhouses, landscaping, interior plant design, and floral design.

Plants, specifically indoor plants or interior plant design, perennially draw me in for their ability to blur lines between inside and outside, to soften the edges of manmade materials and structures, and for their innate and proven ability to reduce stress and promote wellness. Because I frequent urban areas, I feel especially connected with the power to transform interiors in limitless ways by making nature accessible to everyone regardless of limitations of geographical location.

FM: Why do you think plants are having such a moment now?

SB: The houseplant boom of 2020 is undoubtedly rooted in the public's reaction to the struggles of the worldwide pandemic. The majority of the increase comes from the desire to beautify personal interiors as the investment in home has never been more paramount. Other factors are a heightened need for comfort and nurturing, an interest in growing food at home, a desire to imitate social media influencers, and simply for the sake of having more time on one's hands. This "trend" is here to stay and will evolve with us as we continue to adapt to this new home- and social media-centric world of ours.

FM: What are the big, plant-centric trends you love most right now?

SB: My container-driven favorites are plant stands or any pedestal-style container with significant transparency beneath a plant, matte finishes, and unique textures. And my forever favorite styling techniques are no-commitment, easy-to-rotate botanical statement walls — I built one in my home! — layering

GO WILD Stacey Bal, AIFD, EMC, looks for creative containers to add value and finishing touches.

plants in a multitude of varieties and sizes, trailing vines, and propagating specific plants in clear containers and water. In terms of specific plants, *Passiflora edulis* and *Passiflora incarnata* are my favorites. There's something about the vining habit, the tendrils, and of course the otherworldly intricacy of their short-lived blooms. The delicious fruit is a noteworthy bonus!

FM: What plants do you predict will rise in popularity in 2021?

SB: *Rhipsalis baccifera* (mistletoe cactus) for its trailing habit; *Phlebodium aureum* (blue star fern) for its low light uniqueness, *Ficus benghalensis* (ficus audrey) for its ability to be low maintenance, and *Ficus lyrata* (fiddle-leaf fig).

FM: Some consumers (and retail florists) are intimidated by caring for plants. What's your advice to them?

SB: Education is key! A lack of a green thumb stems from a lack of correct information and diligent routine care. With informed selections and an at-home maintenance schedule, anyone can be a green thumb! 🌿

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of *Floral Management* magazine.



COURTSEY STACEY BAL