

Vertical gardening from your home with Garden Stack

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Daniel Matthews-Ferrer, founder of Garden Stack about giving people a break from technology by bringing nature into your home.

Temps de lecture : minute

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People are disconnected from the natural world, with technological distractions filling the void. Garden Stack solves both problems. It is an entirely passive self-watering home gardening system, that matches the automation of its high-tech rivals, while being entirely natural. Garden Stack offers a break from technology and brings nature to your home; there's no app for that!

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

The business revolves around 3D printing technology. I am very motivated by 3D printing as a fast-evolving, strategic technology, and am convinced it will be crucial in our economic future, as geopolitical circumstances change and disrupt supply chains. If the COVID experience—or our incapacity to match Russian shell production in Ukraine—doesn't make people see this ahead of time, nothing will. Cultivating the knowhow to make useful products domestically is crucial, and we believe 3D printing is part of this future. Garden Stack aims to be a useful part of that trend.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Impact Ventures?

Impact Ventures have introduced us to a string of key players aimed at springboarding Garden Stack to success. Impact Ventures offer fantastic opportunities for any startup to maximise its most precious commodity—time—by making the right introductions, at the right stage.

Tell us about the working culture at Garden Stack

We believe in a holistic approach. While specialisation is inevitable as a company grows, there should not be an excessive separation between different sides of the business. The nature of 3D printing diverse objects (at the prototyping stage) means that a lot of physical movement and engagement with the machines is necessary—we have a bunch of printers on shelving racks, meaning you have to constantly climb stepladders, crouch down, etc., and this adds up when compared to a pure desk job—and we think that it is really valuable to have such physical movement and engagement be a crucial component of a day's work, alongside more cerebral or clerical desk tasks.

How are you funded?

We bought our 3D printers following Garden Stack's Kickstarter campaign. Now, we're using a chunk of them to print diverse objects to sell. I started by approaching auto parts shops, but I don't drive myself, and these shops are typically quite far out of town. I live in the centre of Brussels' historic city centre, so I soon realised that souvenirs were the easiest thing I could sell in bulk to shops. Then I realised I could make much higher margins by selling directly at a local crafts market. You can find more info about this at MadelnBXL.com

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Pushing ahead with materialisation amidst a shortage in time and space. The crafts market has been a fantastic opportunity, but it consumes three days in the week, and our workshop space has rapidly become cramped. Day to day, this has been the biggest challenge, by far. However, it also provides motivation to make the necessary tweaks on the product in order to start selling it directly and move into a larger space. If you chip away at any problem the right way, it should provide the fuel to overcome it.

How does Garden Stack answer an unmet need?

Creativity is a spooky thing. While I tend to be sceptical and rational in my approach to life, due to my academic background, I do feel like we as people don't have ideas as much as ideas have us. There's some latent potential in the universe that sort of falls onto us when we have an idea. This is to say, I really believe in the basic idea behind Garden Stack. It is *the* way to grow plants at home. There are many disadvantages to alternative approaches, and only advantages to our approach. I really think that, and it's why I have stuck with it.

What's in store for the future?

Expanding production, bigger versions, more features. Tackling new markets, such as commercial vertical farming, now reliant on energy-hungry systems, is on our radar.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

There is a basic tension behind becoming completely obsessed with an idea and staying sufficiently connected to outside information. I think you really need the obsession to succeed, but if you give it free rein, it can blot out the light. One thing I have found especially useful is joining a Startup accelerator, called [StartIt @KBC](#). It has been invaluable in many ways, but one of the most valuable aspects has been in creating a sense of community with other startup founders and sharing our experiences. It has been an excellent antidote to the effects of obsession in my own case, and I'd suggest other founders find some way to build a community and network around them, whether through an accelerator programme, or a Facebook group. In-person and local is best, I think.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

Chipping away at the big problems daily, and not losing sight of them. For example, I could so easily spend 100% of my time on very real, very important problems, which would nonetheless never advance the core product and business. It's important not to spin your wheels by making efforts that don't push the needle on what matters most. Finding a balance is the toughest part, such as taking a day off! I really believe in the power of structuring healthy habits into your life. I've found that even silly things like living on a top floor apartment without an elevator, and cycling to work, has massively improved my health. Working outside, at the market, eating healthy (I've been on the "keto" diet for over a year), and being physically active at work with my 3D printers helps too. If you can find ways to force yourself to be healthier and happier, as a basic part

of your day, it eventually becomes natural. The next step would be to make time for a hobby, as however healthily you try and structure your productive day's work, some balance with downtime is necessary. I personally enjoy photographing nature, and hope to take a day out of the week to do so at my local woods as soon as I'm able to.

Daniel Matthews-Ferrer is the founder of [Garden Stack](#).



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Article by Daniel Matthews-Ferrer