



# A TIME TO GROW

**I**n the summer of 2020, Amy McCurdy and her family were occupying themselves as many people were during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. “We had been watching a lot of Netflix,” she said.

They discovered a documentary series called “Down to Earth,” in which the hosts travel around the world to find healthy, sustainable ways to live, including planting. It was “really interesting—makes you think a little bit,” McCurdy said.

The Lincoln, NE Branch 8 member and her husband, James, had tried in the past to grow some tomatoes, but their gardening “wasn’t anything serious,” she said.

While quarantining with her family, though, “there was nothing to do. You can’t go anywhere, can’t do anything,” she said. “I’m the type of person who needs to stay busy.”

And so it was the perfect time to try gardening again.

McCurdy started planning by buying some books and by going online to google information and watch YouTube tutorials—“a lot of YouTube,” she said with a laugh.

She bounced ideas off co-workers who had large lots of land and gardened regularly. And she consulted her mother. “My mom has a green thumb. I don’t,” she said. “I asked her a lot of questions.”

By September of last year, the family began by putting together a 6-foot-by-8-foot greenhouse and three raised beds for planting. “My husband used to build houses and had a lot of tools here,” the carrier said. “He was on board and got into building.”

They would “scrounge a lot of stuff,” she said, like wooden pallets from her uncle. With those, her husband built a

couple of trellises, which are architectural structures made to support and display climbing plants. He also added an adapter to the end of the garden hose with two lines and flexible tubing to help McCurdy water her plants more easily.

Winter didn’t slow McCurdy down. Throughout the cold months, she monitored temperatures in the greenhouse. She noted that when it was 13 degrees outside, it was 28 degrees inside and stayed dry. “If we can insulate it, we might be able to keep it above 32,” she said.

She asked her mom to save yogurt cups and egg cartons so she could start growing plants inside, by a sunny window. “I started seeding inside the house and transferred them outside in March and April,” she said.

In the spring, they really got going with the planting. They began to grow

Amy McCurdy  
(opposite page)  
shows off her  
backyard garden  
(below).

fruits and vegetables, including strawberries and potatoes in hanging bags and tomatoes and peppers in buckets.

Other crops eventually consisted of squash, carrots, onions, cantaloupe, cucumbers, cabbage, asparagus, cauliflower, watermelon, wheat grass, garlic, kale, sweet potatoes and three kinds of lettuce.

They also have a pollinator garden to attract bees to help their crops, with sunflowers, marigolds and bee balm. They even started a compost pile to provide plants with a balanced source of nutrients.

The carrier wanted to document the process of creating the garden and mark down successes and failures. “I had to keep track,” she said. “At first, I was overwhelmed, but then I got into a routine.

“One gardening book I got had a checklist and journal. It was super helpful,” she added. “It has a lot of scribbling and erasing in it. Maybe next year it won’t.”

Her children, 17-year-old daughter Jaelynn and 12-year-old son Adam, got into the action, too. “It was a fun family project,” McCurdy said. “My kids like to help pick everything, basically. [They’ll] come out and shove strawberries in their mouths. My son has named some of the watermelons.

“It was fun for the kids to see [things grow] from seeds all the way up,” McCurdy said. She described a soup she had just proudly made for dinner almost entirely with ingredients from the garden—zucchini, cabbage, carrots, onions.

Even McCurdy’s dog, Ranger, got into helping. “He would come out and keep me company,” she said. “Now he keeps the squirrels and rabbits away.”

Working at the post office, particu-

larly during a pandemic, is stressful, the six-year carrier and branch trustee said. “It’s easy to come home and keep thinking about work,” she said.

McCurdy loves being outside and having her garden to focus on, and despite her busy postal schedule, she always finds time to tend to her garden, usually going out every day for between 15 minutes and an hour. “It’s a good way to unwind after work,” she said.

Her success at growing has only made her more passionate about her project. “I’m really excited about [my] butternut squash and watermelon,” she said. “People kept telling me, ‘You’ll never be able to grow that.’

“It’s fun, because I didn’t think it was going to work,” the carrier added. It got her thinking, “Maybe I do kind of know what I’m doing.”

And even as the pandemic begins to wane, McCurdy’s hobby is here to stay. “I already have a bunch of ideas for next year,” she said. The carrier wants to build more raised beds to expand the garden, and also hopes to plant more vegetables and raspberry bushes.

Because of the pictures she posts on social media and a May article in the *Lincoln Journal Star*, her co-workers and customers alike are well aware of her pastime and extensive backyard garden.

She’s no longer just

letter carrier Amy McCurdy. “They started calling me ‘Farmer Amy’ at work,” she said.

And the attention she’s received on her walking route because of the newspaper article? “It’s just funny,” she said. “I feel like a celebrity out here. A lot of customers popped their head out the door.”

McCurdy encourages anyone who wants to start a garden to do so—no green thumb required. “Just try it—you’ll be surprised,” she said.

And if your seeds don’t take off, it doesn’t matter, she added, because you tried. “I hope someone reads this and thinks, ‘If she can do this, so can I,’” she said. **PR**

