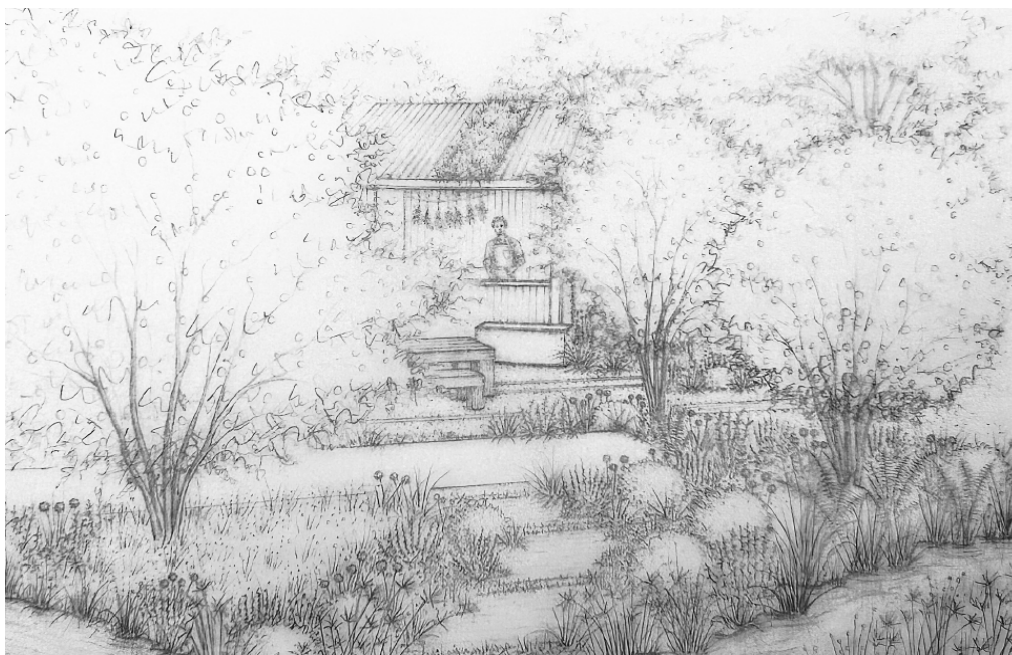
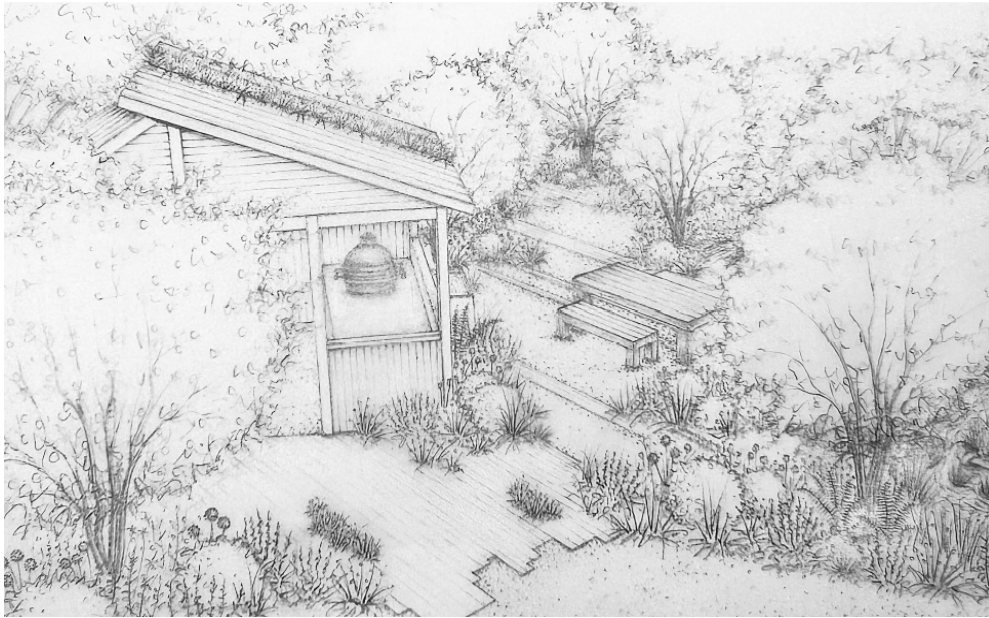


## Adam Frost for BBC Gardeners' World Live 2024

Adam Frost is a popular BBC *Gardeners' World* presenter, writer and multi award-winning garden designer. He is designing the headline Show Garden, *The Chef's Table*, at BBC Gardeners' World Live 2024.



Gardens have always been a major part of Adam's life. He began gardening as child while growing up in Essex and was greatly influenced by his grandparents. Having started out training in traditional horticulture with a Parks department in Devon, he went on to build and later design gardens. A pivotal time in his career began when, aged 21, he began working for the great organic gardener and TV presenter, Geoff Hamilton, who encouraged Adam to train with the highly regarded designer, David Stevens. Following Geoff's unexpected death in 1996, Adam set up his own design and build company, going on to create gardens, including at the Chelsea Flower Show

and BBC Gardeners' World Live. In 2016, Adam began presenting for BBC Gardener's World. He has written four best-selling books and is a popular public speaker.

Adam Frost's *The Chef's Table* will be at BBC Gardeners' World Live at the NEC Birmingham from 13 – 16 June 2024.

[bbcgardenersworldlive.com](http://bbcgardenersworldlive.com)

## Questions

1. Adam, *The Chef's Table* will be a vibrant celebration of home-grown produce, with a rustic outdoor cooking and eating space set amongst an array of tasty edible plants. Tell us more about the inspiration behind the design and why the focus on veg and edible plants?

The garden is really a dream of mine. I love cooking and if I was going to be anything else, I think I'd have been a chef, so maybe I'm the make-believe chef in the story that wants to entertain their friends. It's not overly designed – the idea is there's an unused space at the bottom of a chef's garden where he's found some old apple trees. A stream runs all the way through, and I've created a space where he starts experimenting with his veggies. He doesn't want to grow veg in straight lines, so he plants them here and there, including in a little meadow that's crossed with paths so he can reach them. He mixes things up with some flowering plants and herbs too. It'll be an eclectic mix which, ultimately, is really self-serving. It's about me saying if I'm going back to creating a show garden, I'm going to do something I really want to do.

If you asked me what my hobby in the garden is, it's growing vegetables. I do get frustrated that grow-your-own seems to come in and out of fashion. In times like now when things are tough, I think people instantly think they've got to have a veg garden. What I'm going to try and demonstrate is that you don't need to. A lot of veggies are beautiful and you don't need to isolate them in straight lines or grow them like farmers do. There are interesting ways of doing it, like interplanting with fruit and other things. You don't have to have veg stuck in pots, you don't have to have acres, and you don't have to have a set-alone veg garden. You can have some fun.

I think as a parent, when you grow and provide veg for the dinner table, there's something quite incredible about that, like when you get to give a littun a new potato that you've grown and watch them eat it as if it's this wonderful thing that they've never tasted in their life. It's a connection and a nod to the past, to my nans and grandads. It just feels good, and when you talk to other people that grow veg, they say the same thing.

The Chef's Table is all about engagement and connecting people with their food. To me, that's incredibly important. When it comes to growing veg, I want to say: 'you can do this, have a go, it's not as difficult as you think'. And most importantly, that it's not the end of the world if it goes wrong.

2. Is the process of designing a client's garden different from that of designing a show garden?

For me, gardens are about people. I still run a garden design practice which is my day to day job and it's the client that that comes first. But with a show garden, you're telling a story visually, so I start by imagining the person behind the story. Making that person up means you get to do exactly what you want so, in a lot of ways, you can be a lot more self-indulgent. From the early days when I first built a show garden at BBC Gardeners' World to now, it's always been a lovely experience.

**3. Now, we know that Mrs. Frost has been pretty vocal about not wanting you to get involved in any more show gardens! What made you change your mind for BBC Gardeners' World Live 2024, how much trouble are you in and how on earth will you placate Mrs. Frost?!**

To be fair, she's got a couple of holidays out of it already so she's sorted on that and we're settled, we've calmed the water! It was being poorly that started the whole show garden thing off again for me. This will sound mad to a lot of people, but obviously I ended up talking to psychiatrists and doctors about my head, my life, class, work, connection, and moving forward, and interestingly, out of those conversations, I realised that creating show gardens is something really 'normal' for me.

This is what I'm used to doing – creating something with a group of people for a fixed period of time, the craic, the getting involved, the things that go well and also not so well, and the wide circle of people on site. The 'normality' of it sounds absolutely bonkers, doesn't it? And yes, that's why Mrs. Frost said: *"You know what, if you need to go and do it, go and do it."* And I think that's the whole thing with me now, it's like getting up and having a nice day. I don't get stressed about it a lot now.

**4. Can you tell us about the team behind The Chef's Table?**

I'm lucky! Obviously, I landscaped long before I started designing, and where I live, there's quite a lot of landscapers local to me that I've worked with over the years. Will Harrison from Harrison Landscapes is building The Chef's Table with me. He's in his mid-thirties now but came to work with me when he was 17. Another lad, Tats Shirai, slightly younger than me, came from Japan to work with me in the early 2000s, and others too that I worked on show gardens with back in 2015. The crew have all done show gardens with me, so it's magical to reconnect with people. It's getting back with a load of mates really.

**5. You've invited some rather special guests to join you on your garden, all pretty good in the kitchen we hear – James Martin, Michel Roux, Glynn Purnell, Paul Ainsworth and BBC Good Food's Cassie Best. Can we expect some live cooking in the garden and what's on the menu - anything growing in or inspired by The Chef's Table?**

I am a garden designer that loves cooking, but let's be honest - why wouldn't you want to create a garden and then have these famous chefs come along and cook? They know much more about cooking than I'll ever know so, ultimately, they're coming along to cook for me really! To inspire them, I'm going to provide them with a list of what's growing in the garden, and they'll do the rest. I want it to be a complete surprise! Visitors will be able to watch all the cooking and conversation at the garden.

I've been a guest on James Martin's TV show so now I get to reverse the roles and ask him lots of questions. Interestingly, a lot of cooks and chefs have similar backgrounds to gardeners, so it will be quite fascinating to connect that point up when we chat. I'll also enjoy chatting with Cassie Best from the BBC Gardeners' World Grow & Cook podcast.

**6. Are you a decent chef yourself?**

I left home at 16, moved from London to Devon, didn't go to school as much as I should, and ended up doing a bit of kitchen portering in the evenings and weekends. My career choices were to join the army, be a chef, or go into gardening, and I chose gardening. I'm pleased I did it that way around.

I cook a lot in the winter because I can't necessarily get out in the garden as much. On Saturday tea times or Sundays, you can guarantee that, I'll be in the kitchen, probably with one of the older kids

with the music on. We love it and all bar one of my kids love cooking which is great. I've got that connection with it.

- 7. It seems that gardening and growing are in your DNA, and you spent many happy hours as a child with your grandparents in their garden, greenhouse and allotments. What did those formative experiences mean for you, and might we see a nod to your grandparents' influence in *The Chef's Table*?**

Definitely! I can't smell a tomato without thinking about my nan. I talk about Tidy Nan and Scruffy Nan, and it was Tidy Nan and Grandad that had the allotment. Those really early memories of opening the greenhouse, smelling tomatoes, growing veg down the allotment – that's where it all started. My first seeds, dropping potatoes in holes - it's sat with me. Even when I didn't have a big enough garden and could only grow herbs, I've always grown food wherever I can. Because of my childhood and my grandparents, the garden has always been a safe place. I want *The Chef's Table* to feel like a little paradise at the end of the garden where you can just go and be amongst the veg.

- 8. Of course, this isn't the first time you've designed a show garden at BBC Gardeners' World Live and, over the years, you've created award-winning designs at some of the world's greatest garden events. How would you say that show garden design and your own ethos have evolved over those years?**

I first got involved in BBC Gardeners' World Live when working with Geoff Hamilton back in 1996. Geoff's focus was about understanding soil and the wider world so we built an organic, peat-free, reclaimed garden. Much of what we are doing now, Geoff was talking about then. I think reclaim and recycle, wildflower meadows, that connection with nature: all of those things are now mainstream environmental concerns, which is only a good thing. For me, it's not new, it's normal. What's lovely about BBC Gardeners' World Live is that the show gardens feel accessible. Visitors want to go home not only with a trolley full of plants, but with ideas. I think that's the magical bit about it.

My design process has always been the same. Like I said earlier, I create the people story before I create the garden because gardens are about people. Show gardens always have an element of theatre, but that doesn't mean you can't provide ideas. I want my gardens to be as close to real as possible. My attitude to show garden design has changed over time. At the start, they're all about achieving something in your career. When you've done a certain number and you've done well, that becomes less important. It becomes more about telling the story, making people smile, and creating something you really care about.

I'm a working-class kid. For me, creating gardens has been a way of achieving something. At the start, if I won something, it would get me some work. That's how simple the process was. Then I got slightly sucked in by it all and I loved it, got to work with some amazing people, and then it just kept going. I think it went from '*I want to get on in the industry*' to '*oh, I'm slightly addicted to this process*'. I had to break the addiction to get back in control of it really. I'm still a landscaper at heart that's my profession and I still love building my own garden and making things.

- 9. You've spoken candidly about your mental health challenges. Is being outside in the fresh air with hands in the soil therapeutic for you? Is there any advice that you'd be happy to share with men specifically, that are currently experiencing their own challenges with mental health?**

I think for younger men, things seem better but if you are in your forties, fifties, it's not necessarily that easy to talk. For me, it was off the back of Mrs. Frost and one of the littluns being poorly, then

getting locked in a room with Covid for ten days that left me in a corner in a pile. At that point, I felt like I was letting the whole world down, family included, and couldn't really work out what was going on. I felt completely disconnected from the garden. I phoned the doctor, as you do, because you couldn't see anyone, blubbed my way through and apologised for crying because I'm a bloke. Then, I gradually sat with people that deal with the brain - psychiatrists, doctors, counsellors – and started talking. I think that's the biggest thing we all need to do a little bit more – we need to talk.

I love using my hands, and it was a realisation that I'd become slightly disconnected from where I started from. So, I had to put those things back in place. We moved, downsized to a smaller garden and that was the moment of reconnection with the garden. I think we all need something, whether it's fishing, football, music, whatever. We need to have somewhere to go. I'm lucky enough that the garden is the place that I can go, where I reconnect, put my hands in the soil, to make sure I don't disconnect again.

I think any experience when we go to dark places can re-heighten our senses. I think I started looking at the garden again with fresh eyes and asking questions. Why is it that this plant makes me smile? Why is it I love that aspect about that plant? That's one of the things about the garden – it just does what it does. And if you can find these little moments through the day, through a week – birds coming in, bees, whatever, it just becomes quite magical.

I think it can be quite difficult in the winter in the garden with short nights, the dark, wet and cold. You are going to feel far worse than you are through the warmer months. So, then it's a case of finding a way to reconnect, like walking in the countryside, growing plants indoors or on a balcony, finding a group, going to the garden centre, a cup of tea and a chat. I talk about this publicly because so many people in the land-based industries have these problems. If talking about my mental health publicly helps one person, that makes it all worthwhile. There's no point me preaching to my kids that we need to talk about something if I'm not going to talk myself. It's been a fascinating two years and I've learned a lot about myself.

**10. What practical ideas or elements can visitors to BBC Gardeners' World Live take home from A Chef's Table that they can replicate easily in their own garden?**

There will be lots of ideas. That idea of interplanting, not worrying about having to set aside space to grow vegetables. Then experimenting, maybe looking at veggies and ornamentals through the same lens. Rather than saying, '*well, they sit over there and they sit over there*', looking at them in the same sort of framework. Also, little details with garden landscaping, like how you can move water through a garden or collect water in an interesting way. With the built elements, there's going to be a recycle and reclaim feel which will be lovely. It's also going to be one of the first show gardens to have chefs on it, sharing their ideas for what to make in the garden. I can't wait!