

Fi Morgan- From Behind the Garden

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Our weekly 'From the Garden' newsletter segment by Fi Morgan has gained a cult following. Her no-nonsense, local gardening advice has certainly struck a chord. It came about at a time when literally everyone decided to 'grow their own' in the wake of the pandemic outset, and Fi just couldn't sit by and watch the novice gardener plant eggplants out of season.

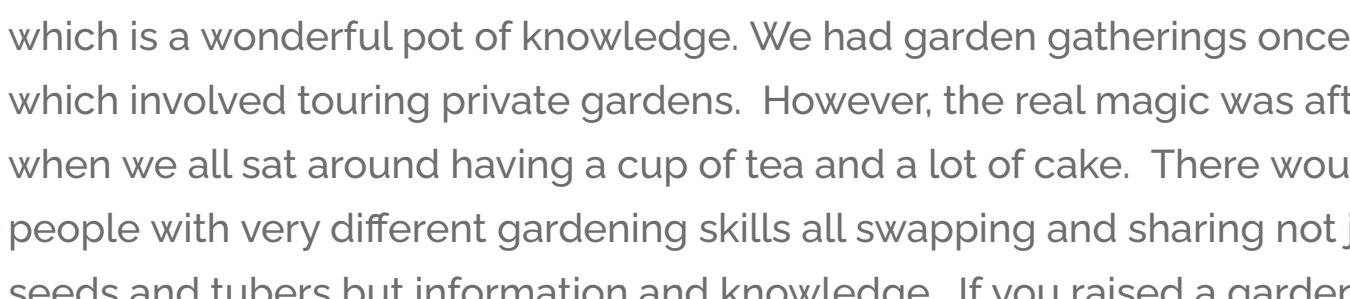
"The concept of food security really hit the community at large. There was panic buying of seeds and seedlings. When I witnessed consumers buying seedlings that were inappropriate for the seasons, I knew I had to act. Hence, my weekly 'From the Garden' piece," says Fi.

In fact, Fi doesn't ever just sit back. Inaction isn't in her DNA. Along with being an avid gardener, she is an environmental warrior and will do whatever she can for the cause. *"If you are not concerned with the state of the planet, you're not paying attention. To stop and do nothing means the worst-case scenario is inevitable. The only way to find a way out of our current mess is to step up in whatever way you can. You just have to pick where you fit in and what you can do."*

We thought it was time to reveal the face behind our weekly gardening segment.....

Fi what drew you to Bellingen?

I arrived in Bellingen seven years ago. I'd been living in drought-stricken rural Victoria, so the rainfall in Bellingen was certainly attractive. I was looking for an artistic, green, environmentally sensitive community. When I drove into Bellingen the first time I said "Yep". It's been a good move.



'Citrus' by Fi Morgan

Have you always been a passionate gardener?

To be honest my obsession is food! But yes, I've always loved gardening. Prior to coming to Bellingen seven years ago I didn't really have my own garden, so was growing my veges and herbs in planter boxes. Being here has given me the freedom to really experiment.

So are you self-taught in the garden?

Basically yes. Soon after I arrived in Bellingen I joined the local Seed Savers group, which is a wonderful pot of knowledge. We had garden gatherings once monthly, which involved touring private gardens. However, the real magic was after the tour when we all sat around having a cup of tea and a lot of cake. There would be 20 people with very different gardening skills all swapping and sharing not just plants, seeds and tubers but information and knowledge. If you raised a gardening concern, you would receive at least five recommendations or solutions and all local knowledge.

What is it about gardening you love?

Growing your own food is very political but also very creative. For me it brings together my passions for the environment and art. Working with nature, with my hands in the dirt, is extremely satisfying and grounding.

Seed Savers is just one of the local community groups in which you've been very active. Why do you throw yourself into volunteering so enthusiastically?

It's a great way to meet people and I really enjoy it. But it's more than that. I had that light bulb moment a few years ago when I realised if you want to bring about change or make a real difference, particularly with respect to climate change and our environment, you need to be a part of a larger organised group. I know something has to happen. We can't keep going the way we are. There are so many areas of concern and signing petitions doesn't achieve terribly much. I was tired of feeling powerless. I became involved in the local Coffs Coast Climate Action Group a few years ago and now realise that together you can make a lot of difference that isn't always possible individually. I have also gained personally from my involvement in these groups.

Can you explain what you have personally derived from being associated with so many community groups?

I've learnt a lot of new skills, but I've also learnt a lot about myself. I've realised that I'm a really good organiser. Despite being an introvert, I've also realised I'm good at reading people and actually quite good at public speaking. Being the co-organiser of the Bello crew of the Coffs Coast Climate Action Group (a subgroup of the Coffs Harbour Group), has been a huge learning curve. I've gained a lot of people skills and how to train and motivate volunteers.

More recently you have become a Facilitator for the OzGreen Resilient Communities Program. What motivated you to become involved?

Our local climate action group was already realising the need to knit the community together after the 2019 elections. It wasn't even about trying to change people's minds towards climate action, but rather just bringing everyone together. Whether people want to acknowledge it or not, the shit is now hitting the fan. If you pull apart at times like these we don't have a hope. The local community groups can tend to be a bit siloed. It was our plan to get the groups talking, hoping to coordinate their activities. This was the first time I talked with the OzGREEN team. Then Covid hit.

Fortunately for our Shire, the Pandemic Response Group adopted this very concept- bringing the community together. And then I heard about the OzGREEN Resilient Communities Program and I knew this was what I was looking for. This is a very practical program that will help the community to come up with the solutions for their major concerns, bringing the whole community together around the key principles of resilience and sustainability. The disasters of the bushfires and Covid have in a way helped to shine a light on what is important. If you want to really effect change, you need to rely on your neighbours. We need those relationships in place. If you don't have these relationships, plus local food and water systems in place, you are in trouble. We need to be able to rely on the people nearby.

Something I really love about OzGREEN is the slower pace of their programs. Ideas are allowed to percolate and change over time and community members are listened to and supported to find their own solutions, which is very unique. This is so different from most western-style projects/programs. I'm really hoping the program attracts community members of varying demographics and political persuasions and that everyone involved realises it is a new, fun and exciting approach to work and finding solutions.



'Time for Fruit Trees' by Fi Morgan

Another of your real passions is art. How would you describe your art?

It's nature based and playful, with an aim to reconnect people with nature and a sense of place. An easy path into caring about the wider world is through caring about what is right in front of you, right down to caring about the herbs on your windowsill. My art reflects nature and living things in all their forms. I'm hoping it helps people to notice that flower on the way to work or the living creatures in the garden. Just to slow down and notice.

The Pandemic has given me the time to reflect and reprioritise. I have let go of certain areas of my work and plan to focus primarily on my artwork. And my environmental work of course.

You have an extraordinary affinity with the natural world. Can you explain this?

We don't exist without nature. We have been given the precarious job of being the carers of the earth, the natural world. It is so much bigger than just us; we are just an integral part of the whole.

I recently read a book called 'The Wisdom of Water' by John Archer. For twenty-five years he has been obsessed by water. His fascination led him to remote temples where water is worshipped as a living deity, to hot volcanic springs and icy waterfalls, to limpid pools hidden deep in the forest. What is revealed is that water is a spiritual being, a god for want of a better word. It has always existed. Water is life and and sacred. Reading this has helped me to verbalise my feelings around the natural world.

I'm not passionate because of me. I don't have kids. Quite frankly protecting the natural world is just the right thing to do. How can you not do anything? I'm here, these are the times we live in. There's an obligation there to act, not just for us but for all beings.

Your weekly gardening advice has been greatly received. Do you have an ultimate vision for this going forward?

For now, I will be taking a small break from weekly writing to focus on my community work. However, food security is crucial for a civilisation, particularly at a time when that civilisation is in decline. I have this knowledge and plan to share it into the future. Watch this space.

Just in case you've missed Fi's previous tips 'From the Garden'.....

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One Comment



Louise Fisher says:

September 15, 2020 at 7:48 am

[Reply](#)

I'm selling my apartment in Sydney so that I can move to Bellingen and build a home on some land where I can have my first ever veggie garden. I'm so excited to learn all about it and can't wait to meet you. Hopefully within the next six months.

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