



# In defence of Food Forests...

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Food Forest Symposium  
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IN DEFENCE OF FOOD FORESTS

## What is the Garden **JUJU** Collective?

Dr Charlie Brennan, Bridget O'Brien  
multi-disciplinary & experienced consultants  
cultivating sustainability, regeneration and  
healing of people, communities and places.

**WORKSHOPS | CONSULTATIONS | DESIGN  
SERVICES | PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

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# Presentation Outline

Introductions & acknowledgements

Food Forests - the inspiring & uninspiring


Problems of mythic Garden of Eden /Edenic Narratives

Projects & On Walkabout - reflective practice

In defence of Food Forests.....why?

Some lessons we are learned - tips and tricks

Some takeaways offered

A close-up photograph of a branch of an Autumn Olive (Elaeagnus umbellata) with green, waxy leaves and clusters of small, bright red berries. A person's hand is visible at the bottom, holding the branch.

Autumn Olive  
*Elaeagnus umbellata*





# Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Gumbaynggirr Nation on the east coast of Australia and Ojibewa Nation of Michigan where this has been written. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We respectfully ask to be guided by the spirits of the places in which we walk, work and live.

We acknowledge the 10's of thousands of years that Food Forests have been cultivated around the world.

Pascoe, Bill (2014) Dark Emu: Black Seeds: agriculture or accident



Old Man Dreaming - Bellingen, Australia



What could be  
more inspiring  
than this?



The work of Robert Hart, Martin Crawford, Dave Jacke & many others spreading Food Forest ideas, imagination & practices around the world.

Designed, generally organic, perennial food systems....

Crawford, M. (2010) Creating A Forest Garden: Working with nature to grow edible crops

Hart, R. (1996) Forest Gardening: Rediscovering Nature and Community in a Post-Industrial Age

Jacke, D & Toensmeier E. (2005) Edible Forest Gardens Vol 1 & 2



Emerging Food Forest in Northern Wisconsin





What is  
less inspiring than  
this?

Mono-cropped,  
poisoned, modelled on  
mining....

Or worse yet - food  
deserts where even this  
does not exist



Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by Peter Wenzel

Food Forests are  
prone to mythic,  
archetypal Garden  
of Eden visions

(see for instance James  
Hillman)

This belongs in the imaginal  
realm & not to be taken literally

**And there are also 'Edenic Narratives'**

A narrative that carries the promise of some idyllic past/future

Cronon, W (1996) *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*



## What we also need is Critical Reflective Practice.

What works?

What doesn't?

What practices should we try?

What ideas, values &  
arrangements are in play..?

Bassot, B. (2015) *The Reflective Practice Guide: An interdisciplinary approach to critical reflection*







We believe Food Forests are **potentially very viable.**

So much more sensible than  
unstable resource-hungry,  
annual, mono-cropped,  
poison-managed undesigned



We   
love  
food  
forests!

Subtropical Food Forest Bellingen, NSW

Star Fruit - Averrhoa carambola

We so need success in these projects !!



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# Food Forest Projects & Walkabouts

Subtropical Food Forest project Thora, NSW

Banana - *Musa* spp.

Amaranth - *Amaranthus* spp.

Lilly Pilly - *Syzygium paniculatum*

Lemon scented Myrtle - *Backhousia citriodora*

Turmeric - *Cercuma longa*

Mat Rush - *Lomandra hystrix*







← Why?!

In defence

OF

Food Forests

1. We find that to design, care, cultivate, manage & publicise Food Forests involves continuously defending them from misunderstanding & damage
2. Most projects we encounter are.....umm....not amazing.....







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Subtropical Food Forest project Thora, NSW

Brazil Spinach - *Alternanthera sissoo*

Peru ground apple / Yacon - *Smallanthus  
sonchifolius*

Sweet potato - *Ipomoea batatas*

Turmeric - *Cercuma longa*

# Food Forests

Some lessons being learned

## Tip & Tricks





## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

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#1 reason why Food Forests fail

### 1. Design the social/people systems

Who will do it? When? Why? What?  
What is the actual clear aim of the project?  
Boundaries, output, inputs, decision-making power....ask and answer collectively.



## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

2. **Be Bold!** Build big berms, dig ponds, use machines as needed, try new plant combinations, add ornamental plants...

Experiment  
respectfully,  
explore,  
create and  
evaluate!



Massey, C. (2018) Call of the Reed Warbler: A New Agriculture



## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

3. The need for **cross-disciplinary approaches and literacy** – a kind of regenerative reflexivity.

*Look toward other disciplines  
and fields of study to draw  
together all the tools needed to  
succeed!*

Kimmerer, R. (2015) Braiding Sweetgrass





## Food Forests Tips & Tricks



### 4. Learn **wild-gardening, gleaning & foraging** approaches, skills and practices

Cultivating wildness

#harvesting the leftovers

#harvesting of the wild

Blair, K. (2014) The Wild Wisdom of Weeds: 13 Essential Plants for Survival



## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

5. Food forests usually take more than a few hours a month to maintain and manage

*Pruning, mulching, observing, harvesting and processing are all part of the food forest 'work'!*

Tsing, Anna (2015) *Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton







## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

### 6. Design in to Food Forests - aesthetics, access and how they are perceived..

Beauty = Increased Buy-in.  
Humans are drawn to, enticed  
by, what they perceive to be  
beautiful!  
And can wander through ..

Zachos, E.. (2013) Backyard Foraging: 65 familiar plants you didn't know you could eat





## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

- 7. Keep making 'edge tension'.** Working with, and in tension with, cycles and seasons, mosaics and succession. **Finding the sweet spot** of the most productivity for the gardeners effort.

What does nature need in  
relationship to what humans  
desire?

Sheldrake, M. (2020) Entangled Life:  
How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures





## Food Forests Tips & Tricks

8. **Love your garden & have fun!**  
Invite yourself back to the  
'more-than-human' party  
going on all around you.



Abram, D. (1996) *The Spell of the Sensuous*





# Takeaways



What's needed now in the Food Forest movement is -

1. **Being bold & experimental**
2. **Honing wild-gardening skills**
3. **Critical reflective practice,**  
**and**
4. **As many successes as possible.**





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# Thank you!

'WE HAVE ONLY JUST  
BEGUN

TO CREATE WHAT WE  
CAN CREATE!



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Please send any

**QUESTIONS . FEEDBACK . SUGGESTIONS . TESTIMONIALS**

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to  
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