

Monday 20th February – Robert Guyton

1. *I'm interested in your 12-chapter book and videos. How to get access to them?*

The chapters are hosted on a blog here

<https://thestandard.org.nz/tag/robert-guyton-forest-gardener/> or I can email them to you if you send your address to mine: rguy10@actrix.co.nz The 12 chapters, under the title, "The Essential Forest Gardener" were posted one-per-week and attracted lots of interest and feedback. There are various videos in which my wife, Robyn and I "show & tell" our projects centred on our forest garden, the 2 most popular being, "An invitation for wildness" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GJFL0MD9fc> and "Growing wild together", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdi_9o92XcU both by Happen Films. We've also been visited by various celebrities (ecologists, chefs, comedians go figure!) who have included their visit and walk-around-the-garden in their television series, the most recent being your very own Jimmy Doherty; we are due to appear on his show sometime soon.

2. *How do we access your e-book?*

As above, you are welcome to email me for the Word document, "The essential forest gardener" as well as from this site: www.sces.org.nz which is our environment centre website where all sorts of other articles and links that may interest you, sit.

3. *Question: What are your top 5 tips for Storytelling?*

Have something real to say; that is, talk your walk. Having lived and breathed forest gardening for 30-plus years gives my writing, I hope, authenticity.

Share the joy. I believe that if you wish to bring people on-board, you must show genuine enjoyment in whatever you are writing about and that should come from feeling genuine joy in whatever it is you are doing.

People are attracted to fun! Everybody wants to have some fun

Be distinct. In my case, my ever-deteriorating appearance; whitening and wilding hair and beard, has served to differentiate me from the crowd and signal a full commitment to my ideals and claims. Professing a love of wildness in the garden when coupled with a wild visage helps to assure people of my commitment, I believe.

Be amusing, if you can. Happily, share your missteps and muck-ups. Don't be afraid to look a duffer. Allow others to advise you on how they see you, rather than rely upon your own assessments. Tell their stories using your own words.

Hint at greater depths, if you have those. My abiding fascination now is with plant/forest sentience and the dialogue that occurs between forest gardener and forest. It's not yet something I would write a dedicated article about, but I drop hints of that nature throughout my articles.

4. *Am wondering what sort of thing Robert grows in the forest garden - what are the main/most abundant crops?*

The diversity here is very wide. I am pushing the envelope constantly, while managing the staples, such as apples, pears and plums. We are essentially cool temperate, suiting pip, stone and berry fruits, but our climate has warmed considerably (we are experiencing a significant ocean heatwave this summer and the effect on the weather has been profound, hence banana growing out in the garden). I seek every novel plant possible, using the network of generous and equally-obsessed growers here in New Zealand, to find plants such as culinary ginger, edible canna, variously-coloured passionfruits, kiwifruit (naturally), chokeberry, a multitude of grape varieties, Japanese raisin, Chinese hawthorn, Chilean wineberry and so on and so on... our staple though, is fruit from the rose family, with apples

being the most productive. We have around 90 different apple varieties here, all of which are heritage, gleaned as scions from the old farm orchards of our region, a project that is on-going for us and has resulted in the return of 10 000-plus old varieties to Southland, as well as a string of 14 orchards attached to the small towns and villages hereabouts.

5. *A less serious question, but as a rabbit enthusiast I'm curious how Robert integrates rabbits into his forest garden (based on the photo he shared) ...*

Ha! The rabbit in the picture was borrowed from a friend and serving as a prop for the article which was about the value of animal manure. My friend breeds rabbits and had a surfeit of manure she was happy to part with.

Rabbit manure is excellent, and while I don't apply any manures to the forest garden, I was in the process of establishing a large tunnel house on new ground that needed a nutrient boost and had collected a range of dung, from hen to alpaca.

6. *I'd love to know which specific books/articles you've read that have changed your perspective on working with nature?*

So many books! I found a copy of "The one straw revolution" when I was a young man and that got me dreaming. I especially liked the way Fukuoka failed in his initial attempts with his father's citrus orchard. Latterly, I've been taking sustenance from the works of Suzanne Simard, Robyn Wall Kimmerer and Monica Gagliano, all of whom write about the interaction between plants and plants and plants and people. I am also embroiled in the growing awareness of fungi and the role they play in forest and human health. I would cite Goethe, Blake and Steiner as powerful influencers of my thinking and behaviour.

7. *Are you getting your articles syndicated? I'd love people here (UK, Wales) to be able to read them?*

I believe The New Zealand Gardener publishes these articles on-line. I write for other publications as well; a search of my name often throws up material I've written. I am also a local-body politician, so if you unearth something controversial, with a photo of me pontificating about climate change or water quality, don't be alarmed. Occasionally, I get into trouble of one sort or another.

8. *What were the challenges when you started your forest garden 30 year ago?*

The land was covered in gorse and broom. I made the mistake of cutting it all down and burning it in spectacular blazes, thus largely wasting the opportunity. This is not a mistake I would make again and has taught me a valuable lesson. The stiff Antarctic breezes gained access to the property and slowed down progress significantly. Overly-vigorous grass growth ensued, further slowing the growth of the trees I was planting. Cow parsley proved the solution to the sward. We were raising a young family at this time and had little discretionary spending money, but as I am frugal by nature, I determined to propagate everything myself. This was a good strategy, but meant my wealthier friends populated their own gardens more quickly than I. In the long run, I value the challenge and recommend a slower, self-driven approach. In the main, developing the forest garden has been an absolute joy. I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity.

9. *Are the articles that you have written available?*

You can find some on-line by searching for my name, I believe. I've referred to some of the short-films/videos that have been produced about our forest garden and way of living.

10. *How often do you host tours, and do you charge for admission, and if so how much?*

I host a tour every day, during the season and yes, we do charge; I think it's \$20 per person, but am not certain as I distance myself from the process as I would do it for free, because

people are so nice; Our environment centre manage the bookings and payments and get something for their trouble. If anyone offers me money on the tour, I wave it away – I'm a hopeless business person.

11. *Do you use on site interpretation Robert or is it mainly by oral presentation?*

Our tour is a guided talk and talk we do! It's different every time, on principle, and follows varying routes, depending on circumstances. We do have some stock stories to tell, but I get bored quickly and take the discussions all over the place, depending upon the interest of the people with me. Some folk want to know "how", some "why" and others want to share their stories. We pick and eat fruit, bathe in the atmosphere, have laughs; it's lovely to be meandering in dappled light, accompanied by inquisitive birds, sometimes grandchildren, feed the native fish, sit and ruminate. Many people simply want to be in a loved place, I reckon.

12. *I'm curious if there are specific metaphors you find resonate with your visitors or audience?*

I guess so. I talk a lot about reciprocity and altruism and the value of giving more than you expect to receive. That resonates, especially with older visitors. Younger people thrill to seeing the mature forest garden, if they are just beginning on their own. I emphasise the pleasure to be had at all stages, from the youthful exuberance to the reflective mature stages. I rate curiosity very highly, as well as observation; they go together, of course. I also talk a lot about broadcasting the forest garden, as seed, by bird, and as inspiration, through publishing. Also, some visitors are excited at stories of night-time plantings on sites away from the garden; roadsides, reserves, wastelands etc;

13. *Do you systematically record your yields - are you self-sufficient?*

Nope and nope. There's too much "produce" coming from our trees to record easily. We can't even cope with bringing it all in, let alone recording as we do so; We don't aim to be self-sufficient, we want to be interactive with our wider community, especially those who grow food in other ways; if we buy carrots, for example, from them, their lifestyle is strengthened. We operate a food cooperative in the village as well as a delivery trading service around the district, so have access to plenty of produce and like to be a provider as well as a customer. Isolation doesn't attract us, my wife, children and I, and we love to see others start up growing, knowing there is a market operating.

14. *How do I get such a gig, writing those articles?*

Ha! I struck it lucky being nominated for a gardening award then catching the eye of the editor; pure happenstance. Happy happenstance. Lots of opportunities followed and once I found my voice, everything flowed effortlessly. I love to write and don't anguish over do it. I'm fortunate in being able to sit and tap it all out in one flurry, send it off with a click and pass the sub-editor test, without any problems (that I've heard of)

15. *How do you go about publishing your first article? Without any track record I mean*

As above. Good fortune drew the attention of a delightful editor of a gardening magazine. In fact, I had been writing forever, but to family and friends, local rags and political blogs. Being published in a nationally-distributed magazine, with photos though, was marvellous and I'm very grateful for the opportunities that's presented. It's meant I've travelled up and down the country for years, speaking as invited-and-paid guest, at clubs, fetes, conferences for a very wide audience (I love talking to an audience, especially where I don't know the topic or when I've done no preparation; in the creative zone

16. *Hardyness zone are you located in? You were talking about temperate, but I also saw bananas?*

We're cool-temperate, transitioning (thanks, climate change) to something warmer. I'm using my big tunnel house to establish plants that will grow out of doors, given a good start. Thinking ahead.

17. *I would like to know if anyone has had any challenges, from the local government or authorities. For having a garden that does look standard. We are edge dwellers also *doesn't look?*

I could write a book about this! Yes, there have been challenges, mostly from disgruntled lawn-order neighbours who use the council as a tool to change our behaviour (unsuccessful tool  I am a councillor myself, managing the region's air, water and land quality, so have a good idea about how councils work. I have always enjoy visits by council staff, inquiring about possible pest plants, humanure disposal etc. etc. Those people are only doing as instructed and enjoy a tour and a laugh. My street-side plantings have attracted the most attention; they are beautiful, but perhaps overly-vigorous, it might be said. I've never had to stop planting, but have followed their pruning advice, pretty much  I'm of the opinion that you will be subject to complaint and disapproval when you go wild, plant unconventionally and seem to reject the gardening manners of the rest of society, but enjoy that ride and don't be personally offended; forest gardening is a noble art and will strike fear into the hearts of those who aren't so.