



Wynlen House Farm

is Bronwyn Richards and Helen Lynch.
Helen leads off ...

As an adult I've always grown vegetables when I had the chance, always growing something. I met Bronwyn here in 2001 and we both enjoyed growing things and we just got on really well, didn't we? So here we are.

Bronwyn: Vegetable queens, literally.

Helen: One side of my family had sheep farms at Collector and the others were cattle farmers in Western Queensland. I was born in Sydney, moved to

Braidwood in my 40s. I ended up working part time in Canberra, in the universities and TAFEs and then for Charles Stuart University at the NSW Police College. For the last 15 years I worked between three and four days a week as a contract educational designer. And then when I hit that magic age, 60, I couldn't get another contract. All the jobs went to people I trained; it was very annoying. So in 2015 I joined Bron in the business full time.

DIGGERS

Bronwyn: I started reading Earth Garden magazine when I was 14.

Helen: Truly tragic.

Bronwyn: Truly tragic. That's right. I was a hippy dippy, and it was like a light bulb came on and I sort of went, "oh, that's how life's supposed to be. You're supposed to grow food and raise animals and oh yes, I'm there". But I was on and off over the years. I've always had a kitchen garden. We always had chooks.

Bronwyn: I'm originally from Wollongong. I moved down here for a change; I wanted a cooler climate. So of course I started a veggie garden here and recognised that it's not the same as a temperate climate. There had to be quite a bit of re-learning. I also went back to working full time as a contractor for the government.

In 2006 my mum was living here and she had a stroke, and the result of that made me rethink about what I was doing with the rest of my life, as often happens. I thought, "why am I working? I didn't move here to be working full time. I moved here because I wanted to grow food". That's what I decided to do.

Bronwyn: So, Wynlen house was born in 2006, and at that time it was ... I was running the business as a small part time business by myself, and Helen, who had just become my partner, was the off-farm income, which supported us. We started as a box scheme. We had some families who were prepared to buy whatever we produced. That was great. That continued until about 2010.

About then I realised that I had to reconsider everything I was doing. I was working really hard but wasn't even looking like being profitable at any point.

We closed the farm for three or four months and I did a lot of research. I imported some tools from the United States, which have revolutionised how we operate, and I also spent a lot of time researching agricultural fabrics for frost protection. I came across a New Zealand company that produces a woven poly in a spun plastic that was porous, so it allowed air and moisture circulation.

Bronwyn: I also then started reading about intensive polyculture and how

FROM WAY BACK

that works in small farm market gardening. And that revolutionised how I thought about growing things. I started practising that particular sort of planting, and now as a result we usually have a range of crops progressing in a bed at any one time. So we're harvesting five or six crops out of the same space at any one time.

There are forms of intensive polyculture but we're practising a bio intensive polyculture, which has a focus on biodiversity and biological soil life. The result is that you're not depleting the soil, but you're actually building soil. I've been doing that since 2010, and it's now 2019, so I've been really developing that process and have developed a particularly good planting mix for cold climate regions because, once again, most of the information you get is for temperate climates.

So our 1000 square metre market garden, which is a very small market garden, is now producing between three and a half and four tonne of vegetables annually, which is quite significant. That's purely down to using the bio intensive polyculture sort of planting schemes and taking care of the soil.

TWO FIRES TIE-IN. HELEN WON THE MARY WHITE COLLEGE POETRY PRIZE AT UNIVERSITY AND GOT TO SPEND AN EVENING WITH JUDITH WRIGHT FOR HIGH TEA IN THE COMMON ROOM.



It's not just about what you plant and what you do to the soil. It's also, once again, a whole farm approach. It's looking at the farm as a whole. It's looking at how you work with what you have in that whole, and how you continue to improve the environment around there.

Helen: Using the chickens, ducks and geese to integrate all our livestock through the market garden, and as a recycling tool for waste produce, et cetera. And the interesting part is that since 2015, we've had to work full time with each other.

Bronwyn: Ah, yes. That can prove a challenge, can't it? Yes.

Helen: But we've survived. We're still here. We're still talking. That was a big change.

Also, out there I'm the best weeder in the universe. If anybody wants to know how to weed, come see me. I just say, where would you like me to weed, she says, "there, there and there". I just do what I'm told — it works.

Bronwyn: Then if she doesn't go where I ask her to weed, I go, "What have you done?"

Helen: It is a challenge because we're both strong minded, independent peo-



BRONWYN AND SON DUNCAN IN 1985 IN ONE OF HER FIRST GARDENS.

ple, with their own views and their own expertise in life.

Bronwyn: We can express those views quite strongly. One of the other things though, that has been interesting since Helen's been full time in the business, is the focus on education — workshops for people and online information. Over the last two or three years we have developed a strong group of people who come here for 'work and learn'. While they're here, they get to understand what's going on and learn about food production, and they do work for us. We regularly have two or three days a week where people are working with us, which is fabulous.

Helen: Bronwyn designs activities for them, so a person working with us can get to learn to plant, to prepare a bed and right through the whole cycle. We've now had one person who's been with us for two years.

Bronwyn: I can grow the food but Helen has the marketing skills and she also brings a huge amount of IT knowledge and understanding to the farm, and the modern farm needs to have that IT knowledge. I can't do that at all. She sometimes has a conversation with me and I might only know one word in the whole conversation because it's a whole IT conversation. She goes, "did you get that, okay?". And I have no idea what she's talking about.

Helen does amazing social media work, which is where small farms particularly have to be. You have to be in that space so that people know who you are and where you are and what you do. ■