



Weekends with the Sunshine Gardening Society

By Sophie, Green

First published in 2023

Genre and Subject

Divorced women
Domestic fiction
Female friendship

Mothers and daughters — fiction
Australian fiction

Synopsis

Noosa Heads, 1987: Newly divorced Cynthia has returned to her home town from Los Angeles to reconnect with her 19-year-old daughter, who is pregnant and determined not to listen to her mother's advice. Cynthia's former best friend, Lorraine, has been stuck mowing lawns as part of a business she shares with her husband - his dream, not hers. When Cynthia convinces Lorraine to join the local Sunshine Gardening Society, they meet young widow Elizabeth, and rootless, heartbroken Kathy. The four women soon discover the society is much more than an opportunity to chat about flowers. Rather, it offers them the chance to lend a helping hand to people whose lives need a bit of care and attention right along with their gardens. Between pulling up weeds and planting natives, the women learn from each other that some roots go deep, and others shallow; that seeds can lie dormant for a long time before they spring to life, and that careful tending is the key to lives and friendships that reach their full potential.

Author Biography

Sophie Green is an author and publisher who lives in Sydney. In her spare time she writes about country music on her website, Sunburnt Country Music. Sophie's debut novel, *The Inaugural Meeting of the Fairvale Ladies Book*, was a Top Ten bestseller and was shortlisted for the Australian Book Industry Awards for General Fiction Book of the Year 2018, and longlisted for both the Matt Richell Award for New Writer of the Year 2018 and the Indie Book Award for Debut Fiction 2018.

Discussion Starters

1. Each section of Weekends with the Sunshine Gardening Society starts by naming a plant. How many plants did you recognise, and which ones were new to you?
2. How do you think the friendships have influenced each member of the Sunshine Gardening Society? What do they bring out in each other?
3. Have you read any other books by Sophie Green? How is Weekends with the Sunshine Gardening Society similar or different?
4. In what ways does the book feel distinctly Australian? You could consider characters, dialogue and plot as well as the setting.
5. Why do you think the author chose to set the story on the Sunshine Coast, and how is the setting important to the events of the novel? Has anyone in your group experienced the 'Noosa magic' for themselves?
6. 'For grief is a trial, the worst she's ever gone through' (page 328). There are many varied losses that the characters are grieving in the novel. How do characters process their own experiences of grief and loss in different ways? Do you think there's a 'right' or 'wrong' way to do so?
7. Weekends with the Sunshine Gardening Society takes place in the late 1980s. How do you think this influences the story? How might the novel have changed if set in another era?
8. 'She wasn't ready to leave behind the structure of her original family life... it was that structure she tried to replicate in her own little family, without questioning whether or not it suited her' (page 103). What does 'family' mean to each character? How have their families shaped who they are, and how they act? At what points in the novel do characters feel obliged to say or do certain things out of a sense of familial duty?
9. 'We all did. We take them for granted, our mothers. But they were people too' (page 65). How does Weekends with the Sunshine Gardening Society explore the theme of motherhood? Consider this question not just through the characters that are mothers themselves, but also discuss the effects their own mothers have had on them.
10. Where do you think each of the women could be in their lives 5 or even 10 years after the novel concludes, and why?

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- The Lyrebird lake ladies choir by Sandie, Docker.
- Mrs Winterbottom takes a gap year by Joanna, Nell.

Author biography from <https://www.hachette.com.au/sophie-green/>

Discussion starters from <https://www.hachette.com.au/news/questions-for-your-reading-group-to-discuss-weekends-with-the-sunshine-gardening-society>

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