Harvest of the Suburbs, An Environmental History of Growing Food in Australian Cities by Andrea Gaynor

As Australians we have been in the rare position of often having the space to grow our own food in our backyards. However, as the traditional quarter acre home lot gives way to urban fill development, many people in Australia today wonder why their parents, grandparents or neighbours spent hours cultivating vegetable patches and fruit trees, and tending poultry–or indeed why they like to do it themselves.

Harvest of the Suburbs explores the important questions of who has grown their own food in Australian suburbs and why, how they have gone about keeping animals and growing fruit and vegetables, what have been the environmental impacts and what can home food-growing tell us about the cultures and values of suburban Australia.

Drawing on sources ranging from gardening books and magazines to statistics and oral history, Harvest of the Suburbs challenges some of the widespread myths about food production in Australian cities, and traces the reasons for its enduring popularity.

It describes changing attitudes and techniques, and explores the relationship between food production and a range of contemporary ideas relating to work, social organisation, gender roles, health and the body, and nature. In doing so, it provides new insights into the tension between the quest for independence and the desire for interdependence in suburban Australia.

Harvest of the Suburbs is a valuable resource for scholars of environmental, urban and cultural history and is essential reading for the modern-day gardener interested in learning from over one hundred years of food-growing in Australian suburbs.

About the author

Andrea Gaynor’s interest in suburban food production began when she was eight, with a failed attempt at growing okra in her parent’s backyard in the Perth suburb of Woodlands. Her enthusiasm undampened by this inauspicious start, Andrea went on to study permaculture, breed international varieties of poultry and occasionally grow a decent tomato. Andrea is co-editor of Country: Visions of Land and People in Western Australia and has published articles on topics ranging from food to feral cats. She currently lectures in Australian history at The University of Western Australia from where she received her PhD.