

RECONNECT

With the people and places that lift you up,
hei pikinga waiora.

The well gardened mind: Rediscovering nature in the modern world

Stewart-Smith, S. (2021). William Collins.



As I was doing my usual Saturday potter in the garden one morning, I heard an interview with psychiatrist, psychotherapist, gardener and literature lover Sue Stuart-Smith and Kim Hill on Radio New Zealand. I was overcome with a sense of connection and resonance because here was a woman talking about what most gardeners know, but still love to hear about, the life-affirming, restorative, and healing powers of gardening.

The radio interview was a plug for Stuart-Smith's new book, 'The Well Gardened Mind, rediscovering nature in the modern world.' The interview prompted me to order the book from the library, where it is obviously in demand. The wait was well worth it as I loved this book. It is a beautiful blend of family stories, wide-ranging history, and modern science—with a good dash of poetry thrown in, too.

As much as I enjoyed the science and history, it was the case studies that I found really fascinating. The book includes the story of her grandfather who, after the trauma of a World War I prison camp, regained his health through a horticulture rehabilitation programme, and how prisoners in New York felt positive about themselves for the first time ever after germinating seeds.

This is an affirming read. In a world that seems increasingly disconnected and lacking in hope, Stuart-Smith reminds us that planting a seed is a gesture of faith and hope, and that gardening can offer us a pathway back to well-being and connection.

Reviewed by Kirsten Edie, Secondary School Teacher and keen gardener.