



weeding women



Weeding Woman Profile Colleen Sheehan, Founder / Director

Writer and mother of two, Colleen Sheehan founded Weeding Women in 1989 – her idea sprouting from the frustration of not being able to find a good gardener to help her at home. The small business quickly blossomed to become an iconic West Australian brand and a successful, growing franchise network.

in her words...

I was born and raised in the Wheatbelt town of Cunderdin. My dad was a second-generation farmer and my mum, a farmer's wife, cooking for our farm workers.

My world was small in the tiny community where we called most adults 'Uncle' and 'Aunty'.

At 11½ years I went to boarding school, which my parents had been preparing me for all my life. Loreto Convent in Claremont was austere and strict in the early 60s (as all boarding schools were at that time). I left there in December 1969, after doing my leaving certificate.

I didn't fit in with the outside world, so in mid 1970 I became a lay missionary for the Catholic archdiocese of the Kimberley.

I began working in the kindergarten of the orphanage in Broome, and then became Bishop Jobst's assistant flying every day to all the missions and outstations in the vast Kimberley region.

I went to live in Sydney with my boyfriend. We became engaged, but after 2 years, I broke off the engagement and returned to Perth.

Craving the vast Kimberley and flying, I became an air hostess with MMA (McRobertson Miller Airlines, a subsidiary of Ansett Airlines). It was during this time I met and married my husband. Air hostesses weren't permitted to marry, but many of us secretly had.

After I left flying, we travelled to Europe on a ship/jet deal. We left with \$1,700 and hitchhiked through Europe, Israel and the USA. We worked where we could.

We returned to Perth 14 months later. The marriage was a bumpy one, but we departed as good friends after having a daughter and a son. They were 11 and 9 years old.

In the latter part of my marriage I had been to Murdoch University and graduated with a BA in English and Comparative Literature.

Prior to my divorce I had been working as a freelance research writer. I researched mostly academic texts, but also one on Aboriginal Education.

I then secured a 12-month contract for the Projects of National Significance for the Bi-Centennial. This was largely because of my references from Traditional Aboriginals in the Kimberley, where the project was to take place.

My two young children and I were based in Fitzroy Crossing, and the work took us in a 1,000-kilometre radius around Fitzroy Crossing throughout the Fitzroy Valley. We spent our time in Aboriginal independent schools. It was remote, hot, lawless to non-Aboriginal kids and like nothing else my children had ever experienced.

We spent our time swimming in the Fitzroy River and water holes, and in and out of 'bough shed' schools with the dedicated non-Aboriginal teachers from around Australia. It was particularly tough on my daughter, and for both their sakes I was glad when it was over.

On our return to Perth, I decided to follow my ex husband to Italy where he lived, to see if there was any chance of reconciliation. There wasn't.

By now my children had been almost two years on 'Distant Education', which they only seriously participated in during the time spent in Italy.

the birth of weeding women

On our return to Perth, I wanted to make a new life. I now only wanted to spend time at home. While endeavouring to write a biography, I suffered with 'writer's block' due to a confronting story I was employed to write. It was suggested that I "get my hands in the soil", so I tried to find some gardeners who could help me with a permaculture project at home.



It proved impossible to find a hard-working gardener, so I employed two female acquaintances who had beautiful gardens and who weren't working at the time. On successful completion of my project, I convinced them to stay on and I'd find us more work. This was the beginning of Weeding Women.

Our growth was like a runaway train. It was just prior to *Gardening Australia* and *Burke's Backyard* airing on TV. This was the beginning of Australia's garden boom.

Weeding Women has never looked back. We began franchising and have found this is the best way forward for Weeding Women. Our high standards, work ethic and valued reputation is a great source of pride among our network of gardeners and franchisees.



As I look back on 25 years, I am amazed at how life, particularly working life, has changed. We are fully computerised and all our leaders carry our mobile phones – oh, how much easier and more professional this makes us!

We have weathered the recession of 1990/91. The boom and busts of mining, the ravages and unpredictability of climate change. But our dedication to providing a consistently high standard of service through the high-quality training of our gardeners, will never change.

I am immensely proud of Weeding Women as its founder and I am now content working part-time, including two days per week in Perth.

I live with my partner, Michael Sinclair-Jones, an award-winning journalist who retired from the fast-paced world of media in the city. He is now the editor of our local monthly newspaper. Semi retirement suits us well.

We reside in the quaint country town of Toodyay, just over an hour out of Perth. Surrounded by rolling green hills in Winter, which turn yellow with canola in Spring and brown in the hot, dry Summer. It is my 'peaceful place'.