



Anna Noon at Teralba Primary School Tiny Forest planting.

# Tiny forests for *huge* change

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Changing the world one tree at a time by growing a whole forest ecosystem on land the size of a tennis court.

An old Greek proverb reads, ‘A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit.’ But now there’s a way to enjoy shade from local forests sooner ... and needing less space than first imagined.

It’s called a tiny forest and it involves densely planting native species to make them thrive in a way not seen in typical landscaping. The result is rapidly regenerated pockets of biodiversity.

Lake Macquarie local, Anna Noon, first heard about the planting methodology when she was looking for local solutions to the global problem of climate change. Developed by Japanese ecologist Akira Miyawaki in the 1970s, it was already tried and tested around the world and within Australia. Anna was convinced, leaving a career in social work to found not-for-profit The Groundswell Collective.

The idea is, at first, counterintuitive. Gardeners who’ve tried planting under existing trees typically fail because bigger trees hog water and sun. As Anna explains, the trick is to plant similar-sized trees at the same time.

Like saplings in a schoolyard, ‘The trees are maturing at the same pace so they’re finding their way together.’

It took two and a half years for Anna to get the project off (and literally, out of) the ground. She was determined that, for the first planting, it had to be on public land for the community to enjoy, and council approval took some time.

The first site was at Booragul, replacing 340 square metres of council-mown grass. Results were astonishing, even for someone like Anna who knew what to expect.



ABOVE This tiny forest at Urban Hum at Cardiff Heights – a former beekeeping farm – is the result of more than 740 natives planted on a 240-square-metre site. Whereas typical street tree planting has a survival rate of around 75 per cent, this tiny forest is at 98 per cent. Providing habitats for birds, insects and even bandicoots, see how it flourishes from the time of planting, (top) to twelve months later (bottom).

*‘Trees are like people,’ says Anna, ‘they do better with friends.’*

‘We were overwhelmed. At the six-month mark [as part of an Earthwatch Australia citizen science project], we were already unsure how we were going to measure the trees: it was so dense and so tall.’

Since that first planting in 2023, The Groundswell Collective has regenerated another eight tiny forests, including locations on the Central Coast.

At twice the size of Booragul’s site, 1100 native plants from 34 species were planted at Cedar Brush Creek in November 2024. In October this year, a site at Wyong Creek will become the coast’s second tiny forest. It will be the fifth new planting scheduled for spring as the movement grows from Lake Macquarie to NSW’s Central West.

Recent scientific developments acknowledge what the Miyawaki Method understood five decades ago: that trees often thrive in groups. They support each other through underground fungal networks and, aboveground, better withstand storms.

In this way, tiny forests seem a lot like successful communities banding together. Explaining the concept to the curious and sceptics alike, Anna finds herself repeating what could become a modern-day proverb. **C**

## PERFECT SITES FOR A TINY FOREST

- Barren space so no trees are removed
- No underground services or overhead power lines
- Accessible to earth-moving equipment for rigorous soil preparation
- Preferably eight hours of sunlight each day (no nearby shade-creating buildings or trees)



LEFT Little Grove Hill planting day planted 12 months after Urban Hum Tiny Forest – next door - Cardiff Heights.