



## "The Business of Being Green,"



by Shelley Levis



Shelley Levis

Are you passionate about gardening? Do you dream of starting an online business sharing your love of all things green? Perhaps you already have a blog and are active on social media but it's just not generating the kind of income that your friends would call a legitimate 'job'.

I'm not exactly 'there' yet... but I'm growing. In this post I will share the seeds of wisdom I have learned from gardenistas I admire and from my own journey along the way. Grab a coffee (or a glass of wine)... this is a post that has been months in the making!

I love Mother Nature, gardening, plants, and all the little critters that share my outdoor Eden. I am not new to this industry by any means but I'm still learning new things every day. I have a degree in Horticulture, I ran my own garden design business for 8 years and have managed a retail nursery for the last few.

I teach classes, give garden consultations and speak at live events on topics related to gardening. Somewhere in the middle of all that, I tend to my own garden, the source of my creation for the content on my garden blog.

My [website](#) was born out of my desire to connect with others that loved gardening as much as I do. One of these days I'll do up one of those memes "What people think I do... What I really do," because most of the people close to me just don't get it. I started to get serious about it back in October 2012 and have had the bug (more like a virus) ever since.



I also love business and marketing. This may seem odd for a tree hugger, but if you plan to be an entrepreneur, then you'll need to embody some of the characteristics of this type of personality too.

While I am cleaning my house or turning the compost, my ears are plugged into business podcasts on entrepreneurship, social media and marketing. I have just as many books on the topic of business as I do on gardening (well just about).

While I have achieved some success, it hasn't turned into my dream job... yet. Some folks have told me that they see me as well on my way. You know how the perception of perfection can come off on [Facebook](#). I guess I can finally agree to that... sort of... but I have a long road ahead and I know that it will be filled with many weeds along the way.

Don't compare your beginning to someone else's middle



I made a big decision this year. I decided that my 'job' is going to work around my lifestyle... not the other way around. Yes... crazy stuff right? I wanted to practice Yoga, but I never found the time to do it. My garden has suffered the last couple of years as a result of a crazy work schedule, and my husband and I haven't been on a real holiday since 2008.

What we had successfully created for ourselves was just more work, but not the kind that served us. It was time to really look at how we got here and what we needed to do to change it. This quote has been a huge inspiration for me:

*It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,  
talented and fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.  
Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other  
people won't feel insecure around you.  
We were born to make manifest the glory of  
God that is within us.  
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
we unconsciously give other people  
permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others.  
—[Marianne Williamson](#)*

Shine on, sister!

After I made this decision, it was time to get laser focused on my goals. Saying that I ‘just want to be happy’ wasn’t enough. What does that mean anyway? I needed to write down some check points and then start planning how to achieve them.

What I realized is this...

I don’t need to reinvent the wheel!



Any marketing podcast you listen to or any business book you read will tell you the same thing. Identify your goals, find someone who is already successfully doing it, and model your path after them.

BUT, this is not to say you ‘copy’ them... HELL NO! You need to put yourself out there as the beautiful, talented, one of a kind, authentically brilliant you.

[The Northwest Flower and Garden Show](#) happens every February in Seattle, Washington. I LIVE for this show!

Gorgeous display gardens, booth after booth of garden goodies and tons of educational seminars on every horticultural topic you can think of.

This is where the who’s who in my industry gets together to dish the dirt. I’ve admired these garden gurus and gardenistas online for some time now. I have read their books, watched their videos and shared their posts.

You get to know people in your genre online. We seem to pop up in the same circles after a while, and short 140-character conversations begin to happen. This is how I first got to know [Teresa O’Connor](#).

Our relationship started through Facebook likes, comments and sharing of posts. When I went to the [Northwest Flower and Garden Show](#) last year, I made a point of waiting till the end of her seminar to introduce myself ‘IRL.’

I honestly didn’t think she would know me from Eve, but when I said I was Shelley from [Sow and Dipity](#), she gave me a huge hug and exclaimed to every one eagerly awaiting to ask their questions, ‘Hey... We’re Facebook friends!’

That’s right people... she said ‘friends’! As I walked away with my husband, he looked at me and said, "She knew who you were, Honey." I was still freaking out that someone I admired actually knew who I was. Wow.

So now I’m going to impart the wisdom I have learned from others and what I have learned about myself.



Succulent heart wreath at the  
2015 Northwest Flower  
and Garden Show

## Listen Up

This year I left my hubby home and headed off to the [Northwest Flower and Garden Show](#) by myself. I made it a priority to meet as many of my favorite gardenistas as I could while I was there. I filled my calendar with seminars and book signings and planned to spend as much time as I could cruising to each and every booth. I was going to connect with people doing what I want to do and learn everything I could about what they had done to get there.

I went online and started tweeting, emailing and PM'ing the ladies I wanted to meet. The worst thing that could happen was... nothing would happen.

(Insert cricket sound here.)

No response only meant I would be no further ahead, BUT no further behind by not trying either.

**First lesson I learned about myself:** Get over the fear of rejection. Don't take it personally, and DO NOT let it stop you from asking. Just ask.

**First lesson I learned about others:** People LOVE to be asked. In fact, your asking validates why they do what they do. Most of the time they are honored that you find THEM interesting, and it is a huge show of respect for their expertise. If they don't have time, most of them will kindly respond, and those that do want to meet up will say... name the time and the place.

The week BEFORE the [Northwest Flower and Garden Show](#) was an experience in itself. Twitter blew up with everyone excited about the upcoming show, and I was connecting with so many people I couldn't wait to meet.

This was the equivalent of being a little girl going to Disneyland to meet her favorite princesses. YES... I was seriously that excited!



Lunch with Teresa O'Connor

[Teresa O'Connor](#) is the writer behind [Seasonal Wisdom](#). She is an author, speaker and a master gardener. [Her website](#) discusses folklore and seasonal gardening, which I absolutely love.

We made a date, and after her seminar on Friday, we headed out of the convention to grab some lunch. Hanging out with Teresa was amazing. She is so easy to talk to, and her sunny personality is appreciated by all that know her.

Teresa admires historical gardens and the men that built them. She loves to share quotes, and one of her favorites is by Thomas Jefferson:

*No occupation is more delightful to me than the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden... But tho' an old man, I am still a young gardener.*

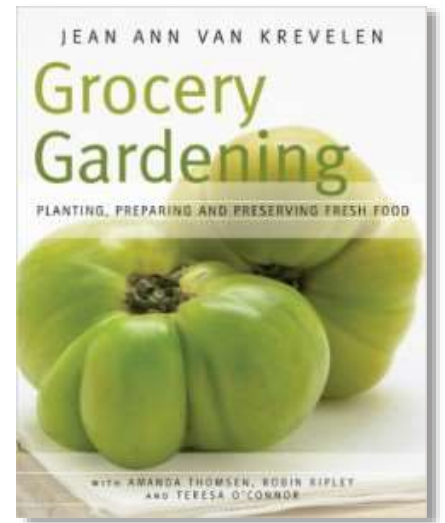
She talks about how Jefferson and George Washington could really be considered the nation's first foodies and shares a garden design on her website: [Founding Fathers Garden](#). Teresa also co-authored a book with [Jean Ann Van Krevelen](#).

While we discussed our passion for gardening and the amazing folks that run in our circles, she asked me what advice I was seeking from her since from what she could see I was a girl well on her way.

I was a little taken back, as I hadn't seen what I had accomplished so far as being that successful. I wasn't exactly staying at the Hilton, my Holiday Inn budget put me 10 blocks away from the convention center. I kept telling myself that the sweaty mess I showed up in from my brisk walk to the show every morning was worth the exercise I was getting.

She made some points and explained that becoming a published author was just half the battle... you need to market that book hard once it's in print.

Basically, what I learned from that conversation is that you really have to want this because it's work. What I also realized.... is that I do.



During my time down at the [Northwest Flower and Garden Show](#) I also had time to meet up with another garden diva climbing her way up the guru charts. [Shawna Coronado](#) is spicy and full of energy. Her excitement for what she does is totally contagious, and it's easy to get swept into a two-hour conversation with this gal... I was amazed she made that much time for me in her packed schedule for the show!

She basically imparted her wisdom of connections and how important it was to reach out, meet and talk to people you both admire and wish to emulate.

Shawna is no stranger to rejection, in fact she sees a 'NO' as just a minor hiccup to getting to 'YES'. In her early days, she reached out to many people developing genuine connections and to brands seeking sponsorship. She worked hard on her social media strategy and has continued to educate herself by expanding her skill set on line and off.

Today, Shawna is enjoying her success as a speaker, TV personality and garden writer. I'm happy to say I own a signed copy of [her latest book](#).

What I learned from Shawna is that you've got to be willing to put yourself out there, failure is okay and to:



## Get off your ass, get over yourself, and make videos

This was the advice she got from [Chris Brogan](#) and the advice that she gives other aspiring gardenistas. Learn more about Shawna and her vision to spread green awareness and social good on her [website](#).

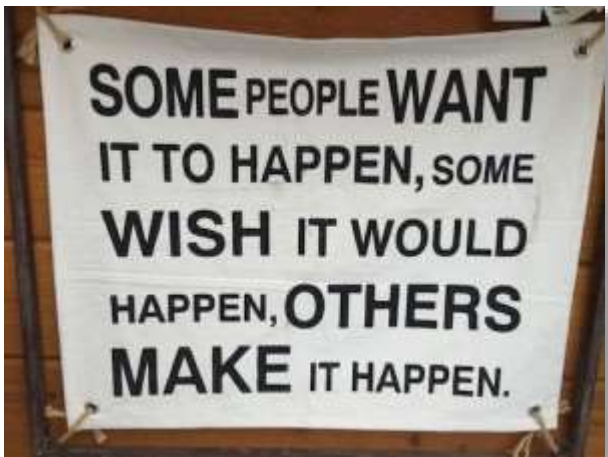
What I took away from my chat with Shawna was a realization about myself. That the magic sauce I was looking for, that 'thing' that she has that I don't, the secret formula for success that I must acquire to be successful too...

## I thought it was outside of me, out there

I realized as we chatted about social media, garden skills, business smarts etc., that I had all those same tools in my tool box. That we really were not that much different at all.

What I REALLY learned is that what she and the many other garden gurus I chatted with over that week had that I didn't was....

### ***TIME!***



Time to focus on their goals. Time to work on their content, gardens and networking. Time to put energy into their passions, to pour their hearts into their chosen paths.

My time up until now had been exchanged for a paycheck... working on someone *else's* goals. I came home after 13-hour days exhausted, trying to throw water on a neglected garden, staying up until 2 a.m. pushing out a post because I hadn't published one in three weeks.

Clearly, I hadn't made MY dream a priority, and that was the one thing in the formula I needed to change. This wasn't going to be simple, and it wasn't going to be easy, because the bills don't pay themselves. But instead of looking at it as an excuse to not focus on my dreams, I decided to exam my skills and ask myself:

What else is possible?

How can I use my skills to pull in an income WHILE I pursue my dreams?

Who do I know, what can I do, where could I work?

The answer is in the question my friends; start asking yourself the RIGHT questions. I was asking myself all the wrong ones, the kind that had a problem attached to it. The kind that already had an answer, a conclusion of how it would NOT work.

I chatted with so many amazing women on my trip down there, every one of them had a little advice to impart that I absorbed like a sponge.

I met up with [Stefani Bittner](#) and [Susan Morrison](#) at the Tweet Up on Thursday morning. These two girls were humorous, energetic and comfortable to be around. They gave me a few websites I should look into and few other tidbits, but what I really got out of that conversation was how they interacted with each other.

They were discussing different upcoming garden shows and events and how they could assist each other with them. The connection of one garden gal helping out the other reminded me of this quote:

**A flower does not think of competing with the flower next to it, it just blooms.**

In most situations on our journey to get noticed in a busy world, we compete with each other. There is this mentality that we need to be better, smarter, prettier, richer, etc. What I witnessed was how helping others meant that you were likely going to get helped in return. That is the way it is at least in the industry I'm proud to be a part of. Gardeners seem to know that the act of nurturing is the key to getting results, in gardens as it is in life.

One of the biggest lessons I learned came from two of the garden world's most comedic gurus I have ever met. [Dawn Hummel](#) and [Stephanie Cohen](#) are a force to be reckoned with, and these gardenistas have no problem getting dirty.

As we sat in the book signing room discussing their ideas about what makes a garden guru successful, we were interrupted dozens of times by folks that came up laughing about their recent seminar on "Trials and Tribulations of Gardening: Dirty Ladies Doing Stand-up."

I was unable to attend their routine, but I heard all about it. If you are one of those plant people that's a stick in the mud, this was definitely not a seminar for you. In fact, Dawn joked about how a few people were a little too 'sensitive' to their racy garden humor and quietly excused themselves from the room.

The message here: don't take yourself too seriously. Even Mother Nature has a sense of humor! Ever get two weeks of gorgeous weather before the last frost date and think you can outwit her by planting your annuals earlier? Ha ha ha!

**Earth laughs in flowers**  
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Dawn spoke about choosing things that make you happy. She clearly knows how to keep a smile on her face while working as a marketing manager for [UpShoot](#), designing gardens and coordinating garden show events. I went with her to return a prop to a booth that she had borrowed for their comedy routine... I think I'll let you just take in the photo that she had me take of her with these two lads from the UK... do you see the joke? LOL, what a riot!



Stefani Bittner, Shelley Levis,  
and Susan Morrison



Dawn Hummell and Friends

Stephanie Cohen is known by many names and describing her as a Perennial Diva certainly fits the bill. Her sassy, no-bones-about-it attitude has netted tons of respect in the industry. She relaxed back in her chair, leaning forward every once in a while to rest her hand on my knee when she wanted to make sure her message was really getting through.

‘Find your niche,’ she advised, ‘and be honest, be yourself. People can sense a phony, and the more authentic you are, the more success you will be in this business.’

She also said several times that “Life does not go in a straight line.” I understood that completely... I most certainly have had to take a few detours to get to where I am now, but I didn’t forget to enjoy the view along the way.

### **This post has been months in the making**

I started it back in March right after I returned home from the [Northwest Flower and Garden Show](#). The first few paragraphs were written nearly six months ago. I have returned to it many times to add a few more lines whenever I reflect back on my NWFGS experience, but chose not to edit the beginning even though so much time has gone by.

Spring happened (get it in the ground), then summer (now water it all and fulfill a million obligations).. and blink! Now it’s fall. Work started to pile on, opportunities opened up and deadlines had to be met. The photos I took at the show to accompany this post have sat in the corner of my desktop forever! Truth is this post is long overdue, but it wasn’t ready to be released until now. Why?

Well... because since the day I began this, so many things have happened. Did I quit my job and pursue my dreams from when I started this post? YES! I put all my energy into my ‘brand.’ I called, wrote, pitched and marketed myself to as many possible people, brands, and events as I could think of.

How’s that working for me? WELL... let’s bring everyone up to date... I’m now working with many big brands that I’m proud to promote, such as:

[Pro-Mix](#)  
[Fiskars](#)  
[Proven Winners](#)  
[Garden Girl](#)  
[Renee’s Seeds](#)  
[Growoya Pots](#)  
[Department 56](#)  
[Art’s Nursery](#)

I have been writing for [my local newspaper](#)’s Home and Garden Pages, I’m a regular contributor to [Stimuli Magazine](#) and I submit posts to [Tourism Langley](#) on a monthly-ish basis.

I’ve also been a speaker at many events this past summer and have several lined up for fall including:



# UpComing Events Calendar



**Sept. 19th- Scarecrow Festival**  
Fun Fall Decorating Ideas and DIY Projects, Art's Nursery

**Oct. 17th- Apple Festival**  
Apple inspired crafts and fall decor, Minter Country Gardens

**Nov. 13th- The Christmas Show**  
Designer Wreath Demo, LEC The Christmas Show

**Feb. 2016- Northwest Flower and Garden Show**  
DIY Stage, 2 Seminars, Outdoor Decor & All about Lavender, Seattle Wa.

I was invited to be a judge for the [BCLNA](#) in spring as well as a judge at this year's [Canwest Show](#). Both were an honor to be a part of.

I started [a radio show](#) and have had the most amazing and inspiring guests.

I was featured on [Shaw TV's Go](#) and just signed on as a client for a talent agency here in Vancouver to work in commercials and TV.

And the latest news, the one that I've been glowing about for three weeks and what inspired me to finally finish this post....

I'm going to be a speaker at the 2016 [Northwest Flower and Garden Show!](#)



LISTEN TO ME LIVE ON

**Nature's Channel**

- \*GARDEN TRENDS
- \*ECO WATCH
- \*DIY TIPS
- \*LATEST DIGS



Yes, I said SPEAKER! Now this is one of those things that's kind of like a roller coaster ride... you are totally excited about it but you know it's going to scare the hell out of you.

...and you can't wait!

All of this came from focusing on my passion, to putting in the time, for having confidence in myself, reaching out, asking for what I want and finally... believing that I could do it.

## AND YOU CAN TOO!

I am so grateful for the connections, friends and new colleagues that have come into my life over the past couple of years. As a garden blogger, I have a whole 'online' life filled with amazing people too.

[The Garden Charmers](#) are a group of talented gardeners from around the world. We support and promote each other, and I am blessed to have these girls literally a few keyboard strokes away.

I've learned so much from my garden heroes and my experience blogging, but what I learned most of all was about myself.

I love connecting with people through the wonderful world of gardening and Mother Earth. The defining moment, the day I got the bug and knew I had to pursue this.... was when I received an email from a woman who lives in the Southwest of the United States.



At this time I may have had maybe 60 people visit [my site](#) a day. I really just thought I was talking to myself and that all this work I'm putting into writing this blog was a wasteful hobby. Knitting at least would give me a cozy sweater to wear.

The woman was referring to an easy hoop house tutorial I had done using some PVC pipes. The purpose of this small greenhouse was to keep the Pacific Northwest rains off my tomatoes in spring. She was inspired to use this model for a very important project herself.

Her letter:

*I can use this idea for raising Monarch Butterflies. Instead of plastic used as a roof I could use netting. It could be made on a smaller scale and be put on part of the deck. The eggs are brought into the house to hatch and the tiny caterpillars grow quickly and safely. When they reach full size, they could be put into a safe area (tunnel made out of net) to mature and be let free. No bugs...predators...just beautiful butterflies...*



Wow... it suddenly hit me. These endangered beauties travel up the West Coast from the southern states to British Columbia. What if one day one of HER butterflies visited my Echinacea in the bed where I was weeding?

I was instantly flooded with how we are all connected. I realized in that moment that if you have something inside you that ought to be shared... then it's a crime not to. That you are here to move the needle on humanity in a good way, and you never know how your idea could be the inspiration for something even bigger than you could ever imagine.

So, here I am... now into mid-September since the start of this post many months ago. I think I'm ready to share it now, and my hopes are that it inspires at least one person out there that actually committed themselves to read all 3952 words. Phew!

This post is one of the most honest and revealing I have ever hit publish on. But I wanted to share my experience and ask that you PLEASE share your experience in the [comments](#) section. I truly believe that connecting with others that are doing what you do or WANT to do is the way to move yourself forward.

***Make It Happen!***