

PEOPLE TENTERFIELD NSW

Rose Hawkins tends to her crop.
FACING PAGE Tenterfield's four distinct seasons make this the ideal climate for growing garlic.



CLOVES OF LOVE

A PASSION FOR ORGANIC FARMING AND A DREAM OF RURAL LIFE ARE FULFILLED ON A THRIVING GARLIC FARM IN NORTHERN NSW.

WORDS JESSICA BELLEF PHOTOGRAPHY HANNAH PUECHMARIN



ROW UPON ROW of bobble-headed, mauve garlic crops lead to native bush at Rose Hawkins' and Steve Scott's certified organic farm in Tenterfield in northern New South Wales.

Sitting on Tenterfield Creek, where the Bundjalung people are the original custodians of the land, the farm was established by Dick and Dora Rochford in the 1980s. "Dick is famous in Australia for growing garlic," Rose says. "The farm was certified organic 35 years ago, at the start of organic farming's popularity in Australia."

Dick experimented with garlic varieties and found that the Oriental Purple and Russian (also known as Elephant Garlic) took easily to the region's sandy loam and temperate climate. Since buying the property in early 2018, Rose, 63, and Steve, 60, have continued to grow and sell these varieties, operating as Tenterfield Creek Organics and expanding their parcel to 55 hectares.

"We had no idea we would become garlic growers," says Rose of the path she and Steve paved while living on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, yearning for a more rural life. "I grew up on a cattle property, but I wanted to run a farm that was for the future: sustainable and organic and good for the land," adds the yoga instructor, author and mum to four adult children.

After visiting Tenterfield, where Steve lived in the 1980s, Rose took a liking to the historic town and rolling hills. "On the drive home, Steve started googling and said, 'You won't believe it, there's an organic garlic farm for sale.' We turned around and that was that!"

Dick spent a year mentoring the determined couple, who continue to develop the farm's ethos today. "One of my sons runs The Farm Byron Bay and is really into regenerative farming, so we are talking with him about the techniques we can incorporate," Rose explains, adding that they have already initiated biodynamic practices and have a no-tillage goal.

The garlic is hand-planted and hand-picked by the couple (and any willing family members prepared to pitch in). "We have specific paddocks that we rotate, and they account for around four hectares – the rest is natural bush. It would actually only be around half a hectare that we grow at a time," says Rose. Garlic crops are relatively immune to pests, she says, "but if they get too wet in the ground, they will rot".

Harvested garlic bushels dry in the processing shed for two weeks up to a month before shipping, and the couple's primary distribution method to their customers is via Australia Post. "It's a risk to send it before it's fully dry, as it can go mouldy," Rose points out.

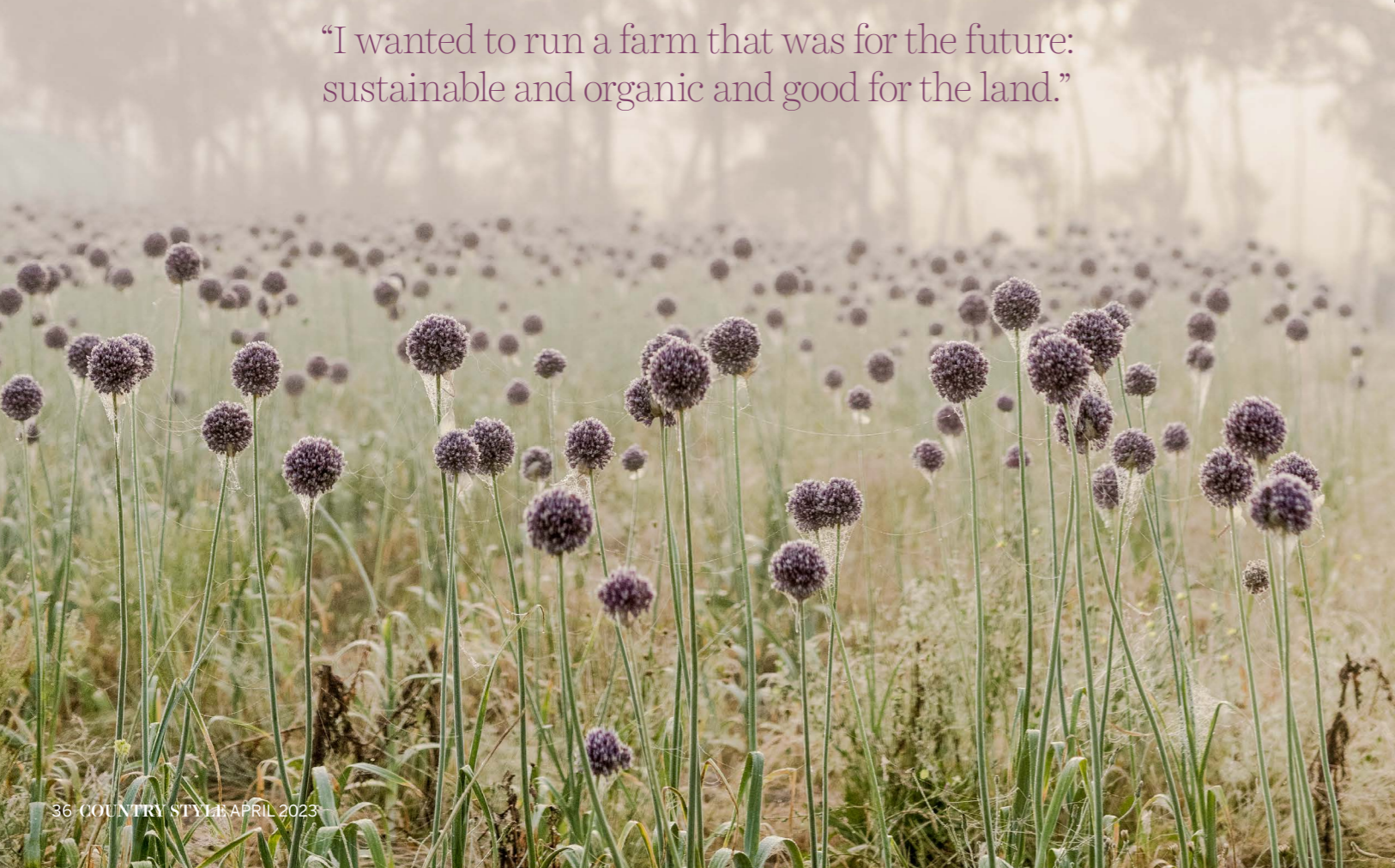
Rustic stone dwellings and landscaping elements hand-built by Dick using rock pulled from the farm accompany the tin-clad outhouses. Rose holds yoga classes in a stone yurt, but plans to convert one of the large sheds into a spacious yoga barn.

Introduced to yoga as a teen, it wasn't until Rose was in her 40s that she devoted herself to the practice and started running regular workshops and retreats. >

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CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE Rose and partner Steve sell their garlic online and mail it at the local post office. "We try not to post on a Friday in case it sits at the post office over the weekend!" Rose says; drying the harvested garlic is an important part of the process; dorper sheep also reside on the farm; Archie the labrador guards the haul; the couple post their garlic to customers in cartons and boxes or, for large orders, biodegradable onion bags. **FACING PAGE** "The Russian garlic blooms into big, round mauve balls that hover over everything, and it looks so beautiful," Rose says.



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Rose and Steve with Archie, Marigold the golden labrador, and a pup who has since found a new home. **FACING PAGE** Garlic also grows in the garden and vegetable beds.

Meanwhile, Steve, who works full-time on the farm, has always enjoyed meditation. “We are both very much into connecting with the breath and the land,” Rose says. “If you can connect with those things, you can connect with yourself and others. It’s how I see life.”

The couple applies this grounded approach to their property. They certainly have been tested since taking over the farm, starting with the extreme drought that led to the catastrophic fires of 2019’s Black Summer. “We were very lucky in that we stopped the fire from getting into our forest country and our home, but it burnt out the creek and we lost the willow trees,” Rose recalls.

Soon after the fires, a hailstorm damaged crops and washed masses of ash into the creek, the farm’s main water source. And then came COVID in March 2020. “We moved here permanently only a few weeks before the first lockdown,” Rose says. “We were definitely very lucky and in the right spot.”

Sheltering in place, Rose self-published *Coming Home*, a book illustrating her yoga journey and lifelong connection to food. “Many people assume that the title refers to our move to Tenterfield, but it’s about the yoga concept of coming home to yourself and feeling whole wherever you are,” she explains. “Having said that, if I hadn’t moved to Tenterfield, I probably wouldn’t have written the book.”

With plans to expand the crop size, and the continual learning and refining of their processes, Rose and Steve aren’t slowing down just yet. Rose is also developing an organic flower farm in a polytunnel, focusing on dahlias and zinnias, and hopes to offer a variety of new workshops. Dick once hosted farm tours for agricultural students, and the couple is toying with reinstating them. “We thought we were moving to something quieter – but we haven’t!” Rose says, chuckling. *CS*
Visit tenterfieldcreekorganics.com, and follow Rose’s yoga journey at rosehawkinsyoga.com.au





CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT Steve and Rose base their social life around garlic, hosting a lunch with family and friends to celebrate the autumn planting, and a spring lunch in the paddock or garden to mark the seasonal picking; "The Oriental Purple has a very herbal taste with a lot of vigour," says Rose of one of their popular grown varieties; the farm was established in the 1980s by renowned garlic grower Dick Rochford and his wife, Dora, who arrived from Ireland the previous decade.

