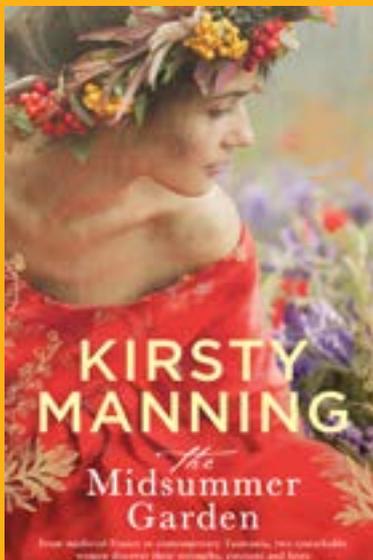




ALLEN & UNWIN'S

Book Group Guide

Conversation Starters



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The Midsummer Garden is a book that lovers of food, wine and gardens will devour. Do not read or discuss on an empty stomach! We would suggest a good bottle of Tasmanian chardonnay or pinot noir, a refreshing Provencal rose, or if you're into reds a good Bordeaux or Spanish rioja. Cocktail lovers do not go past the Artemisia cocktail . . .

Make a classic Martini by mixing 15ml of dry vermouth and 75ml of dry gin. Strain into a cocktail glass. Add 15ml of grapefruit juice and a fresh sprig of Artemisia

If you're dining out, San Sebastian's molecular gastronomy features (à la Pedro) so we'd strongly recommend tapas as the perfect accompaniment to any *Midsummer Garden* book club discussion. For those who prefer to cook at home, spaghetti alle vongole is a great option.

With its wonderful descriptions of gorgeous gardens and lush landscapes, why not try an outdoor setting—or at least a bunch of fragrant herbs or flowers?

Conversation starters . . .

- Although separated by centuries, Pip and Artemisia are physically linked by a set of copper cooking pots. What else do they have in common?
- The garden has long been used as a metaphor in literature. What do you think the garden represents for Artemisia?
- Pip feels like a failure in her family. Her sister, Megs, feels unable to show she's not coping as a working mother. What do you think their experiences say about the expectations that modern society places on women?
- Dom advises Pip to always look for new places and to embrace new starts (page 122). Gabrielle stresses the importance of home and love, and tells Pip that running away will not heal the heart (page 286). Whose guidance would you follow?
- After travelling to Spain, Pip begins to see her relationship with Jack in a different light; *"All this time she'd blamed herself for the broken engagement—and her broken heart. But really Jack had forced her hand. He had been uncompromising."* (page 189) Who do you think is to blame for Pip and Jack's break up?
- Confined both by the physical walls of the chateau and by the social mores of the time, Artemisia is a chattel with few choices in life. Is it unrealistic for Artemisia to hope for happiness?

- ☞ After Jack and Pip's wedding, Pip notes . . .
"In a way, uncovering the mystery of those random letters hidden in the old pots had marked a change for both of them." (page 370)
How do you think Artemisia and Andreas's story impacted on Pip and Jack's relationship?

Be inspired . . .

Explore Kirsty's inspiration for *The Midsummer Garden* . . .

- ☞ France . . . It all started with a glimpse of a turret
<http://kirstymanning.com/a-peek-at-other-gardens/2016/11/23/france-it-all-started-with-the-glimpse-of-a-turret-themidsummergarden>
- ☞ Posies for presents: The meaning behind the herbs
<http://kirstymanning.com/new-blog-2/2016/11/23/posies-for-presents>
- ☞ Stinkpot Bay and North West Bay, Tasmania
<http://kirstymanning.com/foraging/2015/9/1/stinkpot-bay-and-northwest-bay-tasmania>
- ☞ Paris Plant Love
<http://kirstymanning.com/traveltidbits/2017/3/6/random-paris-gardens>

If you liked this book . . .

May we suggest the following?

- ☞ *The Secret Keeper* by Kate Morton
- ☞ *The Forgotten Garden* by Kate Morton
- ☞ *The Distant Hours* by Kate Morton
- ☞ *The Signature of All Things* by Elizabeth Gilbert
- ☞ *The Tea Chest* by Josephine Moon
- ☞ *Half the World in Winter* by Maggie Joel
- ☞ *The Safest Place in London* by Maggie Joel
- ☞ *A Hundred Small Lessons* by Ashley Hay
- ☞ *To Capture What We Cannot Keep* by Beatrice Colin
- ☞ *Maggie's Kitchen* by Caroline Beecham
- ☞ *The House Between the Tides* by Sarah Maine
- ☞ *At the Water's Edge* by Sara Gruen

Praise

'*The Midsummer Garden* is an evocative, lyrical tale of the search for identity by two unforgettable women, separated by history. It's a journey of passion through food, the natural world—and love—towards personal fulfilment. Manning displays her knowledge of gardening, ancient herbs and food as the two story lines intersect and move towards their powerful conclusion. At times I felt I could almost smell the herbs and taste the food as I turned the pages. A fictional *Eat Pray Love* that all lovers of food and wine will devour.'

Sally Hepworth, author of the bestselling *The Secrets of Midwives*

'... What makes this historical romance with a modern day twist different from others is the wonderful detail of herbs and recipes that would be of particular appeal to foodies and gardeners. This is certainly a satisfying read, bound to also delight Kate Morton fans as they wait for her next one as this is also full of wonderful descriptions of historical homes, gardens and secrets.'

Natasha Boyd, Book Bonding Bookstore

About the book

Travelling between lush gardens in France, windswept coastlines of Tasmania, to Tuscan hillsides and beyond, *The Midsummer Garden* lures the reader on an unforgettable culinary and botanical journey.

1487. Artemisia is young to be in charge of the kitchens at Château de Boschaud but, having been taught the herbalists' lore, her knowledge of how food can delight the senses is unsurpassed. All of her concentration and flair is needed as she oversees the final preparations for the sumptuous wedding feast of Lord Boschaud and his bride while concealing her own secret dream. For after the celebrations are over, she dares to believe that her future lies outside the château. But who will she trust?

2014. Pip Arnet is an expert in predicting threats to healthy ecosystems. Trouble is, she doesn't seem to recognise these signs in her own life. What Pip holds dearest right now is her potential to make a real difference in the marine biology of her beloved Tasmanian coastline. She'd thought that her fiancé Jack understood this, believed that he knew she couldn't make any plans until her studies were complete. But lately, since she's finally moved in with him, Jack appears to have forgotten everything they'd discussed.

When a gift of several dusty, beautiful old copper pots arrives in Pip's kitchen, the two stories come together in a rich and sensuous celebration of family and love, passion and sacrifice.

About the author

Kirsty Manning grew up in northern New South Wales. She has degrees in literature and communications and worked as an editor and publishing manager in book publishing for over a decade. A country girl with wanderlust, her travels and studies have taken her through most of Europe, the east and west coasts of the United States and pockets of Asia. Kirsty's journalism and photography specialising in lifestyle and travel regularly appear in magazines, newspapers and online.

In 2007, Kirsty and her husband, with two toddlers and a baby in tow, built a house in an old chestnut grove in the Macedon Ranges. Together, they planted an orchard and veggie patch, created large herbal 'walks' brimming with sage and rosemary, wove borders from chestnut branches and constructed far too many stone walls by hand. Kirsty loves cooking with her kids and has several large heirloom copper pots that do not fit anywhere easily, but are perfect for making (and occasionally burning) jams, chutneys and soups. With husband Alex Wilcox, Kirsty is a partner in the award-winning Melbourne wine bar Bellota, and the Prince Wine Store in Sydney and Melbourne.