2020

the gardener's SURVIVAL GUIDE

GARDENING HAS NOT BEEN CANCELLED!





GARDENING ART
MAKE MORE PLANTS
GROW YOUR OWN VEGGIES
WORK WITH WHAT YOU LOVE



I often say to my team at Lonehill that the only constant is change. Well, how is this for change, and a lot of changes too!

It was a very weird moment when I closed our office a few days ago for who knows how long, and bolted the gate. But thanks to digital inventions and the cleverness of IT people, the show still goes on! Yip, the entire Lonehill team is working from the safety of their homes, so we are still able to bring you the best gardening content to keep you great company during this lockdown period and beyond. This amazing *Survival Guide* that you are about to read is going to become your BFF, bestie, chommie, and everything else. Thanks to our rock at Lonehill, Wendy Moulton, for heading up, creating, writing and designing most of what you are about to explore. Wendy, I thank you! My grateful and heartfelt thanks also extend to Anna and Stephen for all their behind-the-scenes support and creativity!

All that is left to say, folk, is jump in and enjoy!
Keep healthy, and happy gardening.

Tanya

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Tanya's lockdown lessons



I'm supposed to know most things about gardening, and I am probably the most well-prepared gardener out there… But as my late Mom used to say, "You're never too old to learn, my girl!"

Here I go through the lessons I have learnt so far during lockdown, on how to be prepared, and why I say you MUST have these gadgets. This is all from my first-hand lockdown experience: on our 3-acres of garden I normally have two part-time garden executives assisting me, but of course during lockdown it's just me and a whole lot of garden! At times it's really difficult to know what to do first, because my to-do list is long, really long, and I've still got my day job to do – putting together magazines and leading a team. It's crazy hectic but so much fun. Here are my lockdown lessons:

1 Always, always have at least three packs of cable ties stashed away. They solve any crisis, from making a teepee for my beans to tying together trellises or clamping a petrol hose on my lawnmower (but more about that later!).

2 I'm always telling you how amazing hose-reel trollies are! They are beyond marvellous and worth every cent of their price. Here's the lesson: I have three in my garden, but wouldn't you know it, my 30m hosepipe doesn't have one. So after watering the veggie garden and the adjacent shade house, which is full of my late Mom's anthuriums and orchids, I then have to fight with the hosepipe for at least 20 minutes trying to coil it in a neat circle. This exercise makes me want to spit! The hosepipe suddenly develops a life of its own, much like an angry snake. It twists, kinks, unfolds itself and is just badly behaved. So, the moment I am free, I am buying another good-quality hose reel.

www.gardena.co.za

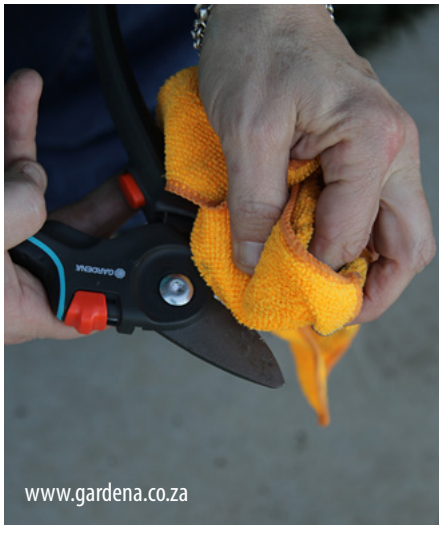
3 Since I'm now running around trying to get to all the sections of the garden, I have noticed that some of the hosepipes have more holes in them than a good irrigation spray head. Never mind the holes, it's also all the joins where a piece has been removed and the pipe then joined – one hosepipe had more than 10 joints. I reckon that the connectors alone are worth more than the price of a brand-new, kink-free hosepipe! So I need to pay more attention to these little things. Oh yes, the frustration levels are high! You know what it's like when you're pulling a hosepipe around or over something and a connector gets stuck… There is fury, rage, expletives, speech bubbles full of stars and explosions, and the harder you pull the worse it gets. Especially if the hose happens to be stuck to your spiky, multi-jointed euphorbia! The result can only be one of two things: either the hosepipe comes loose after removing a large part of the plant, or, even worse, you pull the entire connector out of the joint, and you now have another task to fix before you can even start watering. The lesson: buy only good hosepipes and replace them regularly rather than patching them up.



This elegant spiral hose from Kreator Garden is suitable for smaller gardens and flower beds. www.klbengineering.co.za



4 Back to the story of the cable tie and the lawnmower. I have two of these beasts for my garden, because I am beyond anal about my lawn and am mildly paranoid that a weed seed may hide in a wheel and catch a ride from one lawn to another for a change of scenery. Anyway, as the universe has it, the one will not start (and for some reason lawnmower service centres are not deemed to be an essential service – really?). After checking that there is spark and the other obvious things, like petrol and oil, I am now in the deep surgery phase, which means taking the carburettor apart. I have zero experience with this, but I do have a hammer and a garage full of tools, so why not follow a YouTube video and proceed with open heart surgery? Needless to say, I am halfway there, smelling of petrol and oil, when I realise that I just have to put pen to paper and get my article in before Wendy, our managing editor, sends me one of THOSE messages… And this is where the cable tie came in handy, to hold the bent fuel pipe in place to stop all the petrol from pouring out. That reminds me about another personal gripe, this time about the lawnmower manufacturers: to save costs they no longer have a fuel on-and-off toggle! I can't tell you if the mower will live to mow another day, but what I can tell you is this: always keep extra spark plugs on hand and take an online course on how to trouble-shoot fixing a lawnmower! You just never know when you will need this knowledge.



www.gardena.co.za

5 You can never, ever have too many pairs of secateurs! I am sure that during this shutdown you have located yours (some of you may have less difficulty doing this than others), only to discover that they are completely useless. They are so badly damaged that they can no longer even open a tin of paint, and you now finally understand why your shrubs sometimes look like the end of a piece of sinewy biltong that has been chewed on by a toddler. My advice: buy two good pairs of secateurs, one for you and one for your executive!

Happy gardening!

10 tips to start a food garden



The best time to start a food garden is when you are ready to do it. That could be now, which is ideal because it is the start of the growing season. But because food gardening is a year-round occupation you can start at any time. There's even work to be done in winter, like planning for spring.

1 Know why

Jot down why you want to grow vegetables and discuss it with your family.

Knowing what you want helps with future planning – for instance, do you want go organic?





2 Start small

That's the advice from all seasoned food gardeners. Rather grow into your garden. As your confidence and ability increases, you can tackle more crops, expand the space and aim for sustainability.

3 Find the right space

Veggies and herbs like at least six hours of sun. In order of preference, a north-facing space is best, followed by west- and then east-facing. South-facing is the least ideal. But even if the available space is not ideal, look for creative ways to make it work.



Keep it simple

4

The layout of the beds should be designed for ease of working. Whatever the shape of your beds, they should be accessible from all sides – ideally they should be 1m wide or less. An east-west configuration allows for the best sun exposure on all of the beds. Pathways should be 30cm wide, otherwise space is wasted.





Crammed with rich nutrients from the sea, Bio Ocean Improves soil organic matter and increases soil water holding capacity.
www.atlanticfertilisers.co.za

Build up the soil

5

Vegetables like fertile, well-drained soil. The more effort you put into the preparation, the more success you will have. Dig compost, well-rotted kraal manure, bonemeal and 2:3:2 fertiliser into the soil to a depth of 30cm. Other soil preparation methods include the no-till method, trenching and building raised beds.

Start with easy, seasonal vegetables

6

Choose vegetables the family likes to eat. Start with 3 – 5 easy-to-grow vegetables according to the season and climate of your area. Easy crops are beans, beetroot, Swiss chard, sweetcorn, herbs, sweet peppers, summer squash and tomatoes.



www.mayford.co.za

Follow seed packet instructions

7



www.starkeayres.co.za

Before sowing, read the instructions on the seed packet. It is your best guide for sowing depth and spacing, when to transplant and basic care.

Spread the harvest

8

Plant a few seeds of each variety every 2 – 4 weeks to ensure an on-going harvest throughout the season. Sow leafy vegetables at two-weekly intervals, legumes about three weeks apart, root vegetables about four weeks apart and fruiting vegetables 6 – 12 weeks apart.





Invest in a fungal inoculant like Root Pro for enhanced root growth and suppression of root diseases. www.ecobuz.co.za







Organic liquid fertilizer from www.proteksa.co.za

Water and feed regularly

9

Water your vegetables more frequently in hot, dry weather. Fertilise vegetables according to variety. Root and bulb vegetables need phosphates (2:3:2), leafy vegetables need nitrogen and potassium (6:3:4), and fruiting vegetables need nitrogen (2:3:2) when planting and potassium (3:1:5) before flowering.

Keep a record

10

Record as much as possible – especially the lessons learnt. This makes next year's planning easier and prevents you from making the same mistakes.



Vegetable sowing guide for the year

This is a general planting guide for vegetables for the year. However, planting times will vary according to your specific region and the specific type of seed you choose. Always refer to the instructions on the back of seed packets before sowing. Keeping good records of activity in your vegetable garden will be the best guide for the next year's planting.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Artichokes (globe)	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beans, bush	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beans, climbing	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beans, broad			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beetroot	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brinjals								✓	✓	✓	✓	
Broccoli	✓	✓									✓	✓
Cabbages	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrots	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cauliflower	✓	✓									✓	✓
Celery		✓	✓					✓	✓	✓		
Chillies								✓	✓	✓		
Cucumbers								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leeks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Lettuce	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Melon, sweet and watermelon								✓	✓	✓		
Mealies (sweetcorn)									✓	✓	✓	✓
Onions		✓	✓	✓	✓							
Peas		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Potatoes	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pumpkin	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Radishes		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rhubarb								✓	✓	✓		
Spinach (Swiss chard)	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Squashes	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sweet peppers								✓	✓	✓		
Sweet potatoes									✓	✓	✓	
Tomatoes								✓	✓	✓	✓	
Turnips	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓

Seed sowing

By Alice Spenser Higgs

There's something miraculous about taking a dried out, seemingly dead little seed, putting it in the ground and two weeks later seeing a tip of green pushing through the earth. That sight is always a thrill, even for experienced gardeners.

Sowing seed in the ground

Most vegetables can be sown in situ, and in fact it's easier and quicker to do so, rather than fussing around with seed trays.

- Before sowing, give the prepared bed a final raking, to break down any remaining clumps of soil and remove sticks or stones. The soil texture should be fine.
- It is best to sow the seed in rows rather than scattering them. The term for furrowed rows is drills, and these should be about 200mm (20cm) apart.
- Sowing seed in drills makes it easier to plant the seeds at the correct depth. Large seeds, like sweetcorn, beans and pumpkin, can be sown 30 – 50mm deep while finer seed (carrots, parsley, celery) is planted about 5mm below the surface – but check the recommended planting depth on the seed packet.



Most store-bought vegetables can't match the flavor of homegrown. Vine-ripened tomatoes have fuller flavour. Leaf lettuce is perfectly crisp. Basil is fresh and aromatic… the list goes on. www.mayford.co.za



Invest in a Classic Flower Fork for an ergonomically shaped handle to provide increased handling comfort.
www.gardena.co.za

Vegetable seed sold by reputable seed companies has a 98% or higher germination rate. That's because the seed companies won't sell varieties that don't perform to that standard.



- The easiest way to make a shallow drill is just to take a tine of a garden fork and draw it through the bed to the required depth.
- Try and space the seeds as evenly as possible in the drills. For smaller seeds, mix the seed with mealie meal so that you can see the distribution of the seeds. Try and space the seeds about 15 – 20mm apart.

- After sowing, the seed should be lightly covered with soil drawn over with the back of a rake and then lightly firmed with the back of a spade to seal contact between the seed and the ground.
- Water the seedbed thoroughly, but carefully. The ideal is to have a very fine 'rose' on your watering can.
- Keep the bed moist but not sodden during germination. During dry, windy weather you may need to water lightly twice a day.
- Seedlings can be thinned out, or transplanted, once they are big enough to handle. Check on your seed packet for the final spacing between plants.





Keep your veggies healthy with a fertiliser designed specifically for the food garden. www.talborne.co.za

- To give them an extra boost, use a liquid plant food two weeks after germination and thereafter once a month.



As its name suggests, StartGro supports early growth phases during planting and transplanting. www.ecobuz.co.za

Saving tip

Keep leftover seed in their seed packets in the fridge, the seed will remain viable for a much longer period.



If you are worried about cutworm, use a cutworm bait at the recommended rate of application. www.proteksa.co.za

Sowing in seed trays

Sometimes it does make sense to sow in seed trays to limit the number of seeds sown.

Here's how to do it:

- You can use almost anything as a seed tray, as long as it drains. Try egg boxes, recycle seed trays from the nursery, use take-away food containers.
- Wash containers in hot soapy water or pour boiling water over them and then let them dry.
- A commercial seedling mix should be used rather than potting soil. Seedling mix is finer and allows the small seeds to germinate easily. Or use a mix of palm peat and seedling mix.
- Fill the seed trays with the seedling mix, then water and allow to drain.



- Sow two seeds in each hole – after germination the weaker of the two can be carefully removed.
- Cover lightly with seedling mix or vermiculite.
- Water well, but carefully.



- Seed trays should not be kept in full sun – dappled sunshine is best.
- Keep the seed trays damp during germination and transplant when the seedlings are large enough to handle. The garden beds or containers should be well prepared beforehand.



The best advice is to read the back of the seed packet before sowing. It tells you when to plant, the best position, what depth to plant, how long germination takes and more. There are also step-by-step instructions for the planting.



- To give them an extra boost, use a liquid plant food two weeks after germination and thereafter once a month.



Sea Secret is an organic fish emulsion extract which provides a complete blend of natural soluble plant nutrients and essential trace elements for new and established plants. www.starkeayres.co.za

Problem solving

In the veggie garden

1

Q: I planted some cauliflower seedlings, and after a few days they were covered in tiny green caterpillars. What do I do?

A: All of the brassicas (cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, tatsoi, bok choi and more) suffer from infestations of caterpillars. If you catch it early enough you can pick the leaves that are infested and destroy them, or pull out the seedlings that are affected if they are still little.

On bigger plants and with more severe infestations you'll need to use a pesticide. Our recommendation for anything edible is EcoBuz Larvae Pro, which you dilute and then spray on. It causes the caterpillars to starve and has no effect on any life other than the larvae, even birds that eat the deceased caterpillars.



www.ecobuz.co.za

2



Corrugated planters from www.rainqueensa.co.za

Q: I want to plant a veggie garden, but I live in a house with a paved garden. How do I get started?

A: There are amazing videos on YouTube of people who grow veggies in the cracks between paving, but we're not suggesting you do that. Containers are the answer for paved areas, patios or anywhere with poor soil.

They don't need to be too deep, 20cm is fine, and you can use just about anything that will hold soil. Use a good-quality compost as the base for your soil and add a slow-release organic fertiliser as well as some bonemeal. You will need to feed your plants with a soluble foliar feed every month or so, and keep a close eye on watering.

3

Q: My tomatoes aren't fruiting and my leafy greens are yellow and straggly.

A: Where you plant your veggies makes all the difference. This sounds like a case of too little sun – most veggies need at least 6 hours of sunlight a day. If your veggie bed gets barely this amount, plant wisely – plant taller plants at the back of the bed so that the shorter ones aren't in their shade. Also remember that veggies don't have to go in a 'veggie patch' – you can plant them all over your regular garden, wherever you have plants that need similar water and light requirements as veggies. This also helps with pest infestations.



4

Q: There is a big rotten spot on the bottom of my tomatoes.



A: It appears that your tomatoes are suffering from blossom end rot, which is a sign of calcium deficiency in the soil. This often happens with irregular watering, such as when you forget to water your veggies for a few weeks and then compensate by watering them every day for a week! This might also happen when you've too much nitrogen-rich fertiliser.

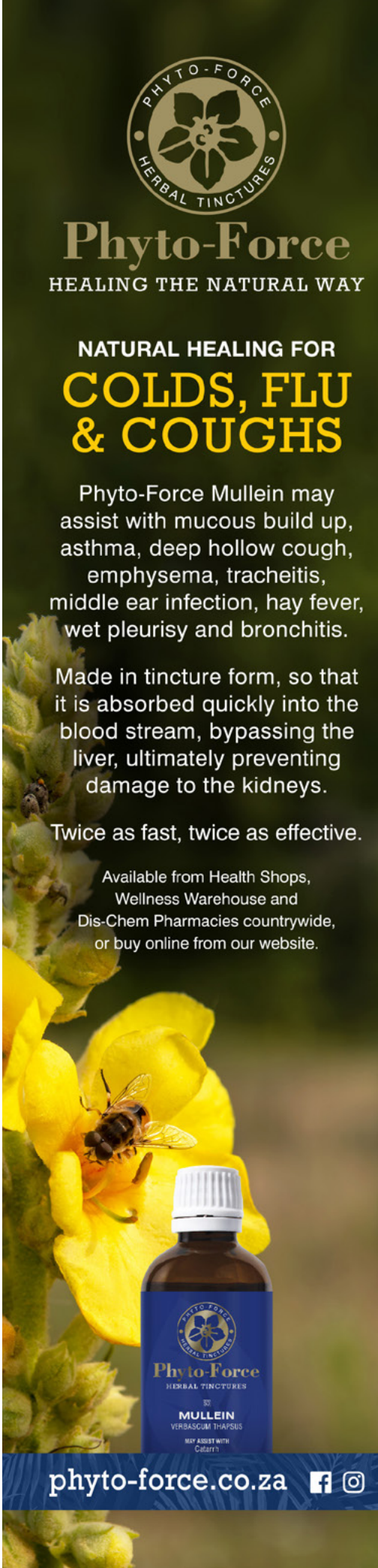
Don't forget that mulch can help to regulate moisture levels in the soil, which can alleviate this condition.

5



Q: My plants are flowering but just not fruiting.

A: This sounds like a pollination issue. Pollinators are key, so you need to attract bees and butterflies to your garden by planting flowers that are rich in pollen and nectar. Borage is a great plant to sort this problem out because it grows and flowers quickly and produces so much nectar. But the best long-term solution is to plant a diverse garden of flowering plants so that there is something for everyone, throughout the year.



RECYCLE AND REUSE



The kids will love this use of egg shells. Add seedling mix and seeds, spritz with water and watch them grow.



Propagate seeds or cuttings in cardboard tubes.



Keep snails away from special plants with crushed eggshells.



Create mini eco systems with PET bottles.



Milk bottle watering can

Check out some more cool ideas on

garden TUBE

YouTube



Use old tyres to contain your veggie garden.



WINNING WITH Bokashi

By Anna Celliers

It was Dr Terou Higa, a horticultural professor from Okinawa in Japan, who, in 1982, introduced to the world a compound of selected microbes that he called 'Effective Microorganisms' (EM). This culture's lifecycle results in a by-product called bokashi, which means 'fermented organic matter' – a mixture of specially selected microorganisms inoculated into a suitable medium that, in an anaerobic atmosphere, work together to restore the natural balance of any organic system.

The daily bokashi regimen

The process of recycling all household waste starts in the kitchen. Initially you need two container sets with taps to drain off liquid and a supply of bokashi, which is readily available from commercial suppliers. You can use any organic refuse – raw or cooked meat, fish, vegetable peels, bones, cooked leftovers, cheese, small scraps of paper and even torn-up cartons. Spread a 6cm layer of refuse in your container, compact it well and sprinkle a layer of bokashi over it. Repeat this process until the bin is full. Although the fermenting process is anaerobic and completely odourless, the bin lid should be airtight and kept closed. Full bins must be stored for two weeks to complete the fermenting process. You will then be left with food waste that has a not-unpleasant 'pickled' smell. This can then be buried in the garden, put on the compost heap or, if you don't have a garden, dumped with a clear conscience. You need to start the second bin while the first one is fermenting. If you don't have an immediate use for the fermented waste, it will keep in any airtight container, without emitting a smell, until you have a use for it.



Earth Probiotic's food waste recycling bin and bokashi.
www.earthprobiotic.co.za

Bokashi in the garden

Apart from the bigger picture, there are lots of household and gardening advantages associated with using bokashi and the EM it contains.

- The fermented waste can be dug directly into the soil in an ornamental garden, or added to trenches when planting vegetables. The microbes in the fermented waste are transferred to the soil, benefiting microbial life and soil structure, and enabling plants to absorb water and nutrients more easily.
- The fermented waste from kitchen digesters can be added to a compost heap to help it break down much faster.
- The liquid, or bokashi juice, drained from the kitchen bins is an excellent fertiliser for pot or garden plants if diluted with water.
- Dog faeces can be fermented with bokashi and buried in an ornamental garden.
- The probiotic liquid drained from your kitchen bins can be poured undiluted down drains and sinks. It unblocks them and keeps them free of odours.





Working with nature to build soil health



THE SECRETS TO perfect **compost**

Gardeners dream of making the perfect compost to feed their precious plants and make them thrive. So how does one get earthy, rich, black gold instead of a smelly rotten mess? Here are our secrets to perfect compost.

1 Choose the right container

There are a variety of containers on the market or you can make your own, but a heap placed directly onto the soil is just as good. A box constructed of timber should have air holes between the timber slats to ensure aeration and should not be higher than 1.5m. Two boxes is ideal – as one matures the other is being filled. Bricks or clay pipes at the base will help with air circulation. These must be spaced about 10cm apart and covered with woody plant stems or small twigs. Do not place on concrete as the soil base helps with aeration and drainage.



The 220-Litre Compost Converter is made from recycled materials and is tough and durable. www.firstdutchbrands.co.za



2 Know your browns and greens

Greens are fresh green matter such as grass clippings, vegetable waste or fresh leaves, which are nitrogen rich. Browns are fallen leaves, straw, sawdust, shredded newspaper and the like, and contain high proportions of carbon. The ratio for good compost is two parts browns to one part greens. Up to 10% of the material can be rough material like small sticks and prunings, which help with aeration and prevent material from packing down and clogging up.







3 It's all in the mix

Mix all the greens together and chop up anything too big. Place a layer of two buckets of browns and then add one bucket of greens. Repeat this process 2 – 3 times, then add a sprinkle of compost activator, ground limestone, wood ash or bonemeal and a handful of soil. Mix thoroughly.

4 Careful watering

The perfect compost heap is moist but not soggy. Water a new pile with 1– 2 litres of water using a fine mist spray, and being careful not to overwater.

It's a common mistake to use too much water. Remember that 'greens' may not look wet but can contain up to 95% water. The overall moisture content should be 60 – 65% (as moist as a wrung-out sponge). It's better for a compost heap to be a bit too dry than too wet – it will just take longer to mature.





Use compost activators to speed up your compost making.

Billions of beneficial microbes alive and ready to degrade organic waste. www.makhro.co.za



5 Be patient

Compost can be made in 6 – 8 weeks, or it can take a year or more. In general, the more effort the quicker the compost. When the material has turned a dark brown and has an earthy smell, the composting process is complete. It's then best left for a month or two to mature.

Take note

- Turn every 4 – 6 weeks.
- Ensure that your heap is covered in wet weather.
- Dry browns (fallen leaves, for example) can be kept indefinitely. Collect them in autumn and store them in plastic bags.
- Evergreen trimmings and pine needles do not rot well and should be avoided.
- Flies and unpleasant smells are an indication of incorrect making, usually too much water. Try adding more 'dries'.
- Shake as much soil off roots as possible before adding them to the compost.
- Newspapers should be recycled to be made into more paper, but small amounts or paper towels can be used in compost.
- Kitchen waste like fruit and vegetables, tea bags, coffee grounds and egg shells should be used, but avoid animal products and cooked food.
- Don't compost coal and coke ash, cat litter, dog faeces or glossy magazines.
- A shredder can be very useful for woody material.
- Diseased plants should be avoided.
- Compost heaps are made by a host of small and microscopic creatures. These are not pests and will not overrun a garden.

diy

BUILD A Stackable composter

This clever composter grows with your compost heap to keep everything neat.



What you need

Cutting list for CCA-treated fencing slats (for four composter tiers)

Longer sides
16 x 600mm x 75mm x 22mm

Shorter sides
16 x 555mm x 75mm x 22mm

Legs
16 x 180mm x 75mm x 22mm

Longer cleats for wire
2 x 505mm x 22mm x 22mm

Shorter cleats for wire
2 x 400mm x 22mm x 22mm

128 full-thread cut screws (4 x 40mm)
550mm x 550mm sieve wire

Tools

Hand saw, tape measure, pencil, combination square, cordless drill with square driver bit, clamp

1. Measure and cut all the timber as per the cutting list.
2. Take two of the shorter sides and lay them on a flat surface, long edges flush. Use an offcut of the 22mm timber as a spacer from the top edge and position a leg piece below it. Screw the leg in place. Do the same on the other side. Repeat this step until you have eight short sides with legs.
3. Clamp the completed leg section to a worksurface. Screw two of the longer side pieces to each end of the leg section, keeping them flush.
4. Clamp another leg section to the worksurface and screw the completed framework to this, edges flush. Repeat the previous steps until you have made four complete boxes.
5. To make the bottom tier, screw the cleats onto the frame, flush with the top of the legs.
6. Place the sieve wire in place. (This helps with ventilation of your compost.)
7. The boxes are ready to stack. Start with the base and one tier. When that first tier is full add another, and so on. If you run out of space you can always make more tiers, or another whole composter.

















Earthworms to the rescue

The best way to convert organic kitchen waste into a powerful tonic for your plants and soil is to farm worms

Earthworms in nature

"What's all this business about worms and wormeries, and how can they help my food garden?" Of course, being a 'worm farmer' I'm asked this question all the time. To answer, I always start with nature and the vital role earthworms play in creating healthy soil.



This Urbalive Worm Farm is available from www.tanyavisser.com

Heathy soil, healthy plants

Earthworms play such a vital role in creating healthy, living soil, and we need to incorporate them into our cultivation practices. First, to attract them into your veggie beds you should:

- avoid using inorganic pesticides and fertilisers that will kill them;
- avoid disturbing the soil by excessive tilling, as this exposes them to sunlight that kills them and destroys the microorganisms that give the soil life;
- apply frequent mulches of compost that provide an attractive, moist environment for them.

And then, to complement these practices, you should start a worm farm that will give you nutrient- and microorganism-rich humus and worm 'wee' to apply as concentrated fertilisers to your soil and plants.



What is a worm farm?

A wormery is a contained way to get a large population of special worms to convert organic waste into vermicompost (containing worm castings) and vermileachate (worm 'wee'). You can either buy a ready-made worm farm or make one yourself out of old containers you may have, such as wooden boxes, baths, or drums. If you upcycle plastic containers make sure you punch holes in them to aid aeration. You need to determine what will suit your needs, both in terms of shape and ability to accommodate the volume of waste that is generated in your kitchen and garden.

The wormery has to be populated by earthworms that are able to cope in the conditions particular to that man-made environment. There are over 3000 varieties of earthworms, and only a few will survive in a wormery. For this reason one can't simply dig up a few worms in a healthy corner of the garden and expect them to thrive in the wormery. Like most worm farmers, I have populated my wormeries with red wigglers (***Eisenia fetida***) and they process organic matter into compost at a remarkable speed. Vermiculture specialists supply suitable species, and in an order you can expect young and mature worms plus egg capsules, all contained within a mix of organic matter.



How to feed your worms

To keep a wormery functioning optimally one must remember that each red wiggler is able to consume the equivalent of its own weight in food each day under ideal conditions. If you start a wormery with about 250g of worms (up to 1000 worms) then they are unlikely to be able to deal with more than that weight of organic waste to begin with. As their numbers increase they will be able to convert more and more 'scraps' into compost and leachate, eventually dealing with all your kitchen waste and some of your garden cuttings.



You can now buy ready-made vermicompost from Wonder. www.wonder.co.za

What to feed your worms

Green veggie peelings and plate scraps
Potato peels
Cereals
Mouldy bread, cakes, biscuits and muffins
Pasta
Egg shells
Tea bags and coffee grinds
Paper and cardboard (wet and shredded)
Most fruit
Pesticide-free leaves
Well-rotted cow, horse or chicken manure



What NOT to feed your worms

Pineapple
Citrus fruit
Onions and garlic
Meats and bones
Faeces
Dairy products
Fresh sawdust, manure or grass clippings
Processed foods with salts and vinegars
Used cooking oils
Wood ashes

Wizzard Worms
Need something to do?
Make yourself an efficient worm farm.
You probably have all the bits required.
FREE ADVICE AND DIRECTIONS
Please contact Don at don@wizzardworms.co.za
www.wizzardworms.co.za



Using worm products in your garden

Remember that vermicompost and vermileachate are concentrated fertilisers, so you don't need to use as much as regular compost to get super results. It can be used as a mulch around established plants, or added to planting holes for new seedlings. Worm wee can be diluted with water and sprayed directly on the leaves of plants as a tonic, or added at full strength to the soil as an inoculator.

Keeping your wormery healthy

Worms need a moist, well-aerated environment that stays within a temperature range of 15-25°C. Unrotted manures or fresh green grass clippings should never be included in their food as these will generate heat that will kill your worms. Likewise, in summer take care to put your wormery in a spot that will be shaded during the hottest time of the day, and in winter rather move your wormery indoors if you live in a cold part of the country.



Article by Don Blacklaw from Wizzard Worms – www.wizzardworms.co.za.

START YOUR OWN WORM FARM

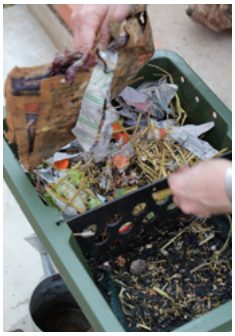
What you need
Worm farm
Worms
(These can be ordered and delivered to your door – yes, even the worms. Worm farms come in various designs and are made of different materials. Some contain a series of trays or compartments with holes in the bottom for the earthworms to migrate through. The size of the worm farm is determined by the volume and type of organic material to be processed, and your budget.)
Kitchen waste
Straw
Newspaper

Process

1. Lay a layer of newspaper on the bottom of the container and then a layer of straw.
2. Add the worms and feed them the box they came in.
3. Add a cup of kitchen waste, making sure not to overfeed them until they start multiplying.
4. Cover the worms with a layer of wet newspaper and wet this paper every time you feed them.
5. Place your worm farm in a sheltered position out of the sunlight.
6. Place a jug underneath the tap to catch the vermileachate.
7. When the container is full, separate the vermicompost from the worms and place the worms back in the container to repeat the process.









MAKE MORE PLANTS

Propagating plants is easy and fun, and you can use what you have in your own garden. Plus it will save you money and is good for the soul.



SOFTWOOD CUTTINGS

Plants that can be propagated using this method include fuchsias, lavenders, leonotis, hypoestes, phygelius, cane begonias, justicias and salvias.



STEPS SOFTWOOD CUTTINGS



Cut off the terminal growth tips with 4 – 6 pairs of leaves before pruning down the fuchsia bush.



Prepare the cuttings for planting by removing two or three pairs of the lower leaves with a sharp pair of secateurs, or sharp pen knife. Trim the remaining leaves in half to reduce the transpiration rate.



Cut the base of the cutting 5mm below a chosen node or leaf joint. Try and make all cuttings approximately the same size (8 –10cm).



Dip the tip of the cuttings into water and then into hormone rooting powder for softwood cuttings. Shake off excess powder.



Plant the cuttings into 15cm pots filled with a mixture of one part of peat moss and one part of sharp river sand. Place 10 – 15 cuttings in each pot. Bury them up to the first set of leaves.





A specifically formulated hormone powder that naturally facilitates the rapid stimulation of softwood cuttings for fast and prolific rooting.
www.mahkro.co.za

Water after completing the task and place the cuttings in a greenhouse or in a lightly-shaded position in the garden. Keep them evenly moist at all times. Rooting should take 4 – 6 weeks. Plant on into individual pots before setting your new fuchsias out into the garden.



HARDWOOD CUTTINGS

Generally, woody-stemmed plants with strong cane-like stems that have matured for a full growing season are suitable candidates for hardwood cuttings. Not all deciduous plants can be grown in this manner, but local garden plants that can include poplar, willow, plane tree, rose, spiraea, weigela, mock orange, fig, pomegranate and ***Hibiscus rosa-sinensis.***

Note: Some genera on this list include species on the list of declared, alien-invader plants. Do not propagate any plant that appears on this list!



Talking about hibiscus, Malanseuns has a new range of exquisite hibiscus varieties. Check out the range on www.malanseuns.co.za and ask your local nursery to place an order.



STEPS HARDWOOD CUTTINGS



Harvest the cuttings from suitable mother plants. We used ***Hibiscus rosa-sinensis.***



Use a pair of sharp, clean secateurs to prepare the individual cuttings. All foliage, leaves and thorns, if applicable, must be removed.



Cut them off as close to the stem as possible without damaging the dormant eyes or nodes along the stem. Cut into lengths approximately 25 – 30cm long and group into bundles.



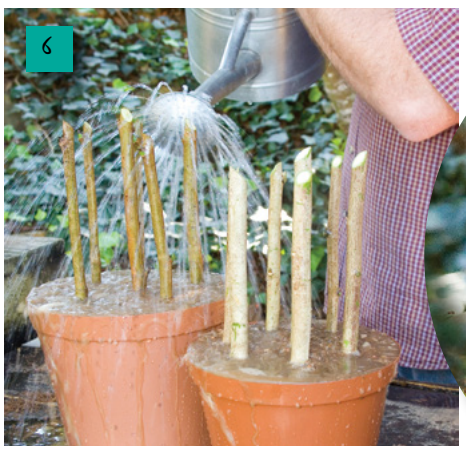
Dynapoot hormone powder, to stimulate fast and prolific rooting of plant cuttings. www.starkeayres.co.za





Dip the bases of the cuttings in water and then into rooting hormone powder. Use the correct strength for hardwood cuttings.

Plant the different bundles of cuttings into a trough or pot filled with a fine grit or river sand. Make sure that the top-third of the length of the cuttings is clear of the sand. Bury the lower two-thirds of the stem length.





Water thoroughly and keep in a sheltered position to root or callous before planting out. Label them with a name and date of planting.



Have some fun gardening with the hand tool garden set from KLB Engineering. The set includes carbon-steel pruning shears, a stainless-steel hand trowel with a wooden handle, and a pair of garden gloves with antiskid studs.

www.klbengineering.co.za


Acanthus mollis


Phlox paniculata


Anemone japonica

ROOT CUTTINGS

Plant propagation by means of root cuttings is a simple and efficient way of producing more perennial plants with soft, fleshy roots. Examples include ***Acanthus mollis*** (bear's breeches), ***Phlox paniculata*** (perennial phlox) and ***Anemone japonica*** (Japanese anemone).



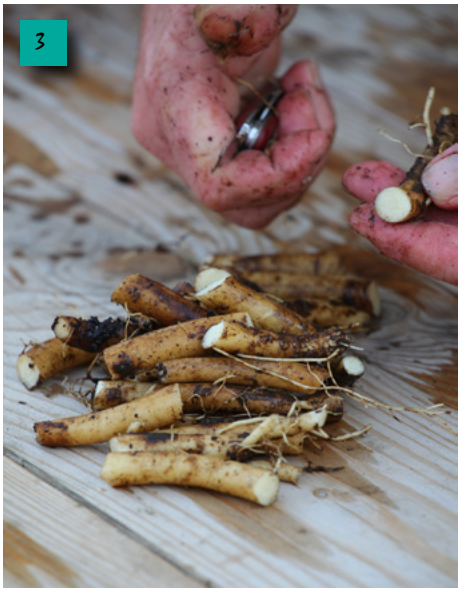
STEPS ROOT CUTTINGS



Dig up the entire plant or alternatively remove suitable roots from plants growing in the garden. The best roots are thick (preferably thicker than 5mm in diameter) from close to the crown of the plant.



Wash off all excess soil or growing medium from the roots.



Trim off all fine or fibrous rootlets, leaving only the thick fleshy roots. Cut these into sections 5 – 10cm long in the case of thick roots and 7 – 12cm long if the roots are thin and wispy.



Place these sections of root into a medium of equal parts of river sand and peat in a deep plastic tray.



Cover the roots with the same growing medium (sand and peat) to a depth of 10 – 15mm.



Firm down with a wooden stamper.



Water well to allow the root cuttings to settle snuggly into the rooting medium.



Place the tray of root cuttings into a propagating frame or store it in a shaded part of your garden. Keep it relatively dry until growth emerges. If the rooting medium is too damp the cuttings may rot.



LEAF CUTTINGS

Have you ever wondered how to grow more plants from your much-loved ***Begonia rex*** (painted-leaf begonia)? Well, if you have a lush and healthy plant that can spare a leaf or two, try these two interesting ways where the veins of a single leaf can soon result in new rooted plantlets.



STEPS LEAF CUTTINGS



Make your soilless medium by mixing palm peat (that has been saturated with water in a bucket) with an equal amount of vermiculite or perlite.



Fill up the tray with this medium, which should be moist.



Remove a young healthy leaf and trim off the leaf stem. With the underside facing you, use your knife to make 1cm-long incisions along each of the strongest veins on the leaf.



Press the leaf, cut side down, onto the rooting medium. Secure it with paper clips bent to resemble hair pins.



Place the tray in a clear plastic bag in a light place, but out of direct sunlight.



Inflate the bag so that it does not touch the leaves, punch a few small holes in it and seal it.



Add perlite to improve soil structure.
www.tanyavisser.com

CLICK

Click here to see how to do this on

garden TUBE



As soon as clumps of plantlets develop from the cut veins, carefully lift and separate them, retaining a little of the medium around the roots of each one. Pot them up into potting soil in individual small pots.



3 WAYS TO GROW MORE ECHEVERIAS

You can never, ever have too many echeverias! But relax, you don't have to kick yourself for not buying more when you had the chance. If you already have a few in the garden or in pots, you can easily grow lots more in one of the three following ways:



1 Beheading is fine...

This might sound a bit rough, but 'beheading' means cutting off some of the rosettes with a short piece of stem intact and leaving them in a shady place for a few days for the cutting wounds to callous over.

The next step is to plant them individually into some small pots filled with a mixture of damp potting soil and river sand, or even some sandy, gritty soil from the garden. Wait for a few days to allow the cuttings to settle in before watering them lightly. Keep them in a spot with morning sun and afternoon shade, and water only when the soil feels very dry.

When you feel some resistance when pulling on a cutting, roots have started to develop.

2 Lay in the stems

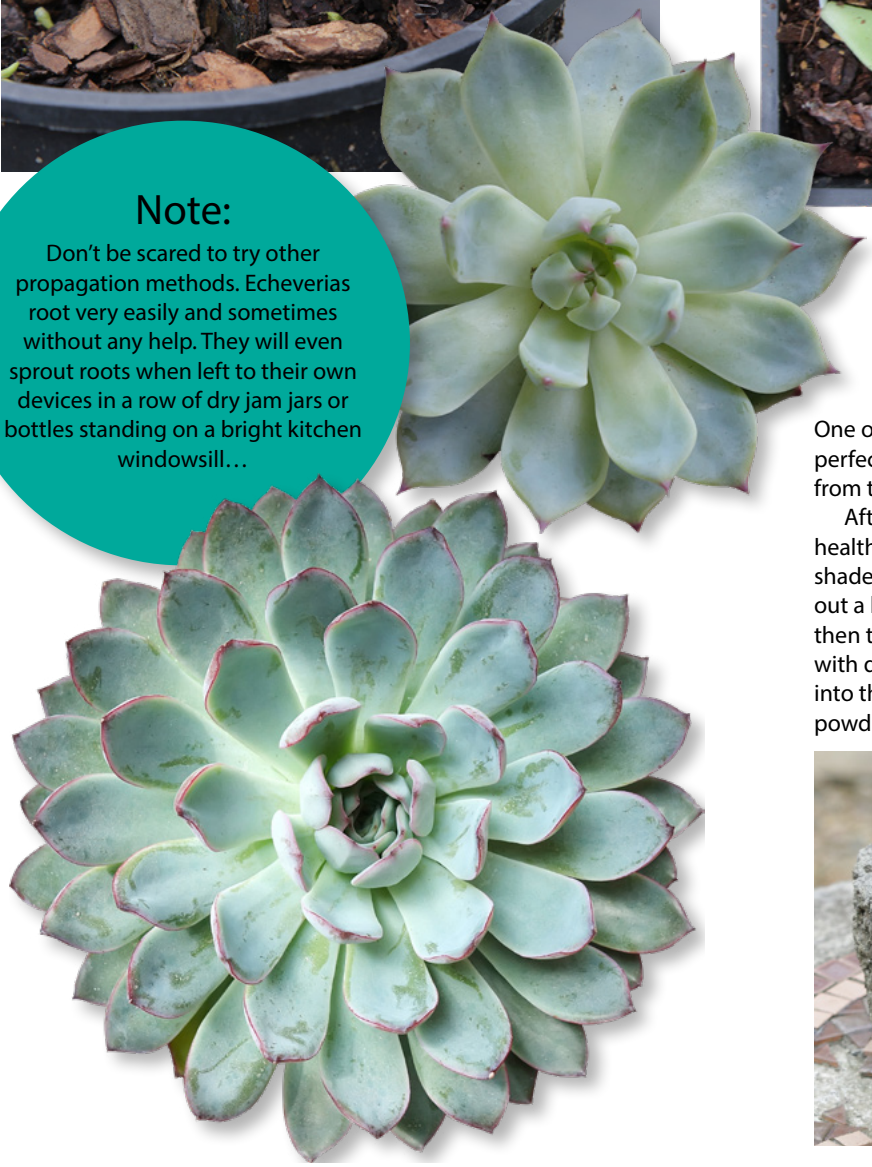
If your echeveria mother plants have become a bit stretched with long and winding stems (which they often do) and you have done the 'beheading' thing described above, you can cut the elongated stems into pieces and lay them on their sides, lightly pushed into soil in a seedling tray or plastic pot. The stems will sprout roots and you will soon see perfect little miniature rosettes forming at the nodes. Again, take it easy on watering– the soil should first be left dry and then only kept slightly damp.





Note:

Don't be scared to try other propagation methods. Echeverias root very easily and sometimes without any help. They will even sprout roots when left to their own devices in a row of dry jam jars or bottles standing on a bright kitchen windowsill…



3 Just do it with leaves

One of the wonders of the succulent world is to see a perfect little rosette and long pinkish roots developing from the base of a healthy echeveria leaf.

After gently pulling the individual leaves from a healthy rosette, lay them on a layer of newspaper in the shade for a few days to allow the bases of the leaves to dry out a little. Dip their ends in rooting hormone powder and then they can either be packed horizontally on a tray filled with damp soil, or 'planted' upright, but not too deeply, into the soil. (This will probably work without the rooting powder, if you don't have any at hand.)



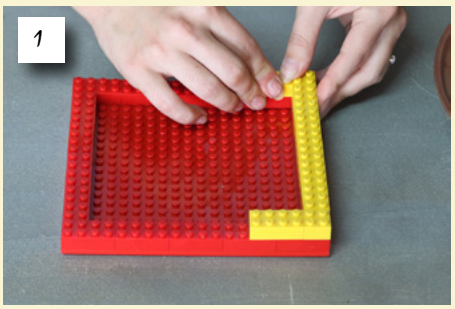
FUN PROJECTS

Lego birdfeeder

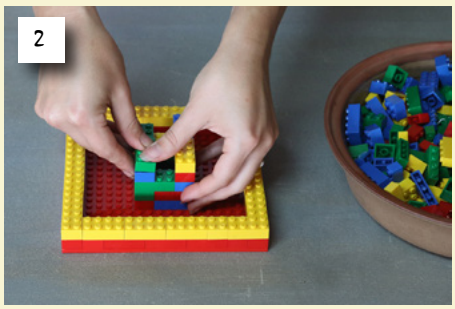
This is a great craft for kids, or a way to use those old Lego pieces stuck in a box in the garage. All you need are a few pieces of Lego and a flat space to place your finished masterpiece.



Place in a tree or on your patio.



Build a wide base with a rim for the birds to stand on.



Leave some space inside the rim, and build your Lego house with windows and ledges to place more seeds inside and more space for the birds to perch.

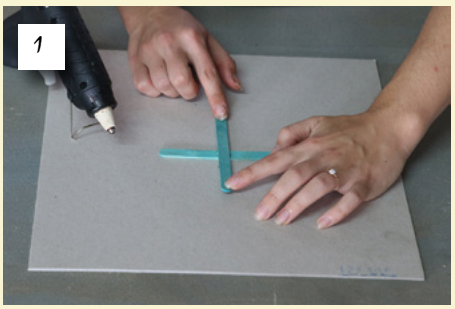


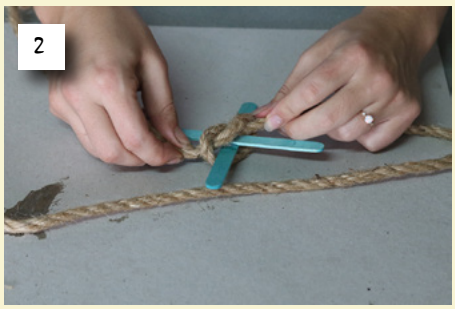
FUN PROJECTS

Cake pan birdfeeder

Baking lovers (or ex-bakers with extra equipment) will love this DIY, and it is by far the quickest and easiest one on the list. This cake pan birdfeeder is great to hang outside your kitchen window.









Tie twine around a block of wood or 2 ice cream sticks glued into a cross and pull the twine through the hole in the cake pan. Fill with bird seed

FUN PROJECTS

Teacup birdfeeder

Bring some Alice in Wonderland whimsy into your garden by hanging these topsy-turvy teacup birdfeeders from the trees in your garden.





Glue the teacup on to the saucer on its side, using epoxy.



Tie twine or light chain to the teacup handle and hang from a tree.



Place the bird seed in the teacup and on the saucer, spilling outwards.

We're all about upcycling these days and one of the most useful items to reuse is the humble tin can. Using a cleaned can from your kitchen and some leftovers from the garden, make these fun decorative planters for all your favourite indoor plants.

FUN PROJECTS

Tin can planter





Spray paint the tin can to cover any spots that may show through.



Choose your materials and glue them piece by piece onto the can, using a hot glue gun.



Make sure you choose the right pieces to cover as much surface area as possible.



Plant up the can and place in a sunny spot.



FUN PROJECTS

Make your own wind chimes

Have some leftover bamboo from an old garden project? Try this easy DIY to make your own wind chimes.





Measure and mark the bamboo from the top of a node to the length you want. Cut the top just above a node, and cut the bottom off at an angle. Repeat for another 7 segments, making each a different length.



Drill a small hole in the tops of each of the segments for hanging.



Drill 8 sets of two small holes close together around the edges of a small block of wood, which will form the top of the chimes.



Cut off 8 pieces of wire a few centimetres long and tie a knot around each one with some nylon string.



Feed the wire through the small hole in the top of each chime and pull to secure.



Attach each segment to the block of wood by pulling the string through one hole in a pair and out the other side. Measure to the length you want and tie a knot to secure, cutting off any excess string. Attach an eye screw to the top of the block of wood to hang.

Hang your wonderful new chimes on your front porch or patio!



FUN PROJECTS

Kokedama

All you need to make your own kokedama are plants, moss, string and a few tools and tricks

By Anna Celliers

Get the look

The Japanese word '*kokedama*' literally means moss ball, and a collection of these moss balls suspended from the ceiling or some other structure is called a string garden. Creating a string garden with your own kokekama is a lovely way to spend a wintery afternoon and is not very difficult to do (except for the moments when you wish you had more than two hands!).

You need

Newspaper
Twine
Dried moss or coir (the coir used to line hanging baskets also works)
Vermiculite
Water-retention granules
Potting medium
A few metres of thin steel cable (available per metre at hardware shops)
Metal lugs
Stainless steel cup hooks
Side cutters
Pliers or a crimping tool
Scissors
Plants of choice



Watering a kokedama

Unhook the plant from its hanging spot and place it in a bowl half-filled with water. Leave it to soak for quite a while before draining it properly and suspending it again. This process should be done once a week to every ten days in cooler months and more frequently in very hot weather. You can also use a mist sprayer to mist the plant leaves every few days, as plants like ferns and orchids love humidity in the air.



I removed the sandy soil medium from the roots of the succulent that I was using and replaced it with another medium I made by mixing a commercial rose and shrub potting soil (which has a heavier clay content) with a handful of vermiculite (a lightweight water-retentive medium) and a big pinch of water-retentive granules. Moisten this mixed medium to make it easier to work with.



To keep the soil mix in place around the roots of the plant and to fashion it into a ball, place both onto a sheet of folded newspaper and fold and press it firmly into a ball while using twine to keep it in place.



Next, start packing a layer of dried moss around the paper-covered ball, winding twine tightly over it. Keep doing this, going around and around, until you have covered the root ball with a thick layer of moss and string, finishing off by tying the string into a tight knot. (You can also use fishing line instead of string.)



Some kokedama makers use string to suspend their completed kokedamas, but I used steel cables for a more professional look. Cut a length of cabling with the side cutters and crimp a metal lug and a cup hook to either end, using pliers or a crimping tool. Hook one cup hook into the moss ball and suspend the plant from the ceiling with the other cup hook.

Tip:

If you are going to create lots of moss balls that will be hanging together, remember to cut the steel cabling into different lengths to make the end result more interesting.

FUN PROJECTS

Quick-sticks plant labels

Gather together some ordinary household and garden stuff to make your own plant labels. Big hands can do the cutting and small hands can do the writing. This helps the small folk with their spelling as well as with identifying garden plants.

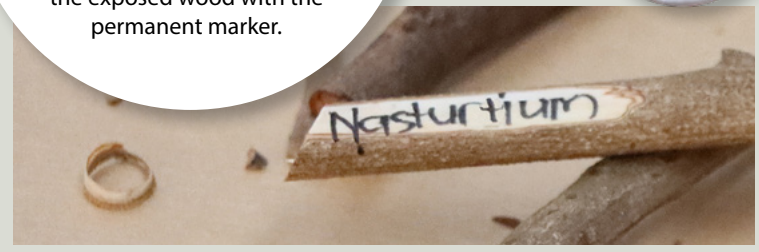
Get together:

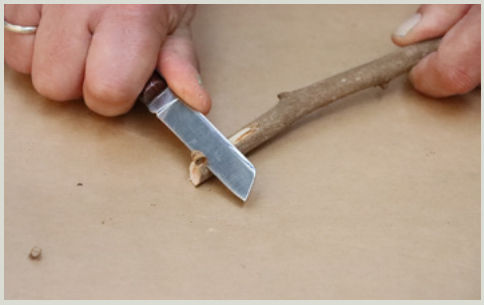
Empty yoghurt containers (clean them well)
Large stones
Sturdy sticks
Scissors
A sharp penknife
A permanent marker



Stick labels

This needs strong hands and a sharp penknife, but is a very effective and cheap way to label things like cuttings. Simply carve the outer bark off a stick and write the plant's name on the exposed wood with the permanent marker.







Stone markers

Use the permanent marker to draw simple pictures and write plant names on stones. This is a good opportunity to show the children a picture of the plant that is going to be labelled, as well as teach them something about it.















Yoghurt labels

- Use scissors to cut off the rim of the yoghurt container.
- Cut some strips (as wide as you want) from the side of the container.
- Snip one end of each strip into a sharp point and use the permanent marker to write the plant's name onto what is now a label.



Hot tip:

When labelling something like a tray or pot of freshly planted cuttings or sown seeds, remember to add the date when it was done. This will give you an indication of how long specific plants take to germinate or root.



FUN PROJECTS

Stone cactus garden

Get together:

Paint brushes
Craft and acrylic paint
Gravel chips
River sand or soil from the garden
A small clay plant pot
Different sizes of smooth pebbles or stones

Pebbles and pretty stones from the garden can be turned into lovely 'pets' or floral-themed 'art' or this cool cactus garden.





Add a layer of gravel to the pot and then fill it to the top with sand.



Clean the pebbles or stones, then paint them in different shades of green and leave them to dry.



Dot small spots of acrylic paint all over the stones, to resemble typical cactus thorns.



Decide which side up you are going to 'plant' your cactuses in the pot, and decorate the correct side with little flowers of bright craft paint.



As soon as the stones are completely dry, press them into a tight group in the sand in the plant pot.

Note:

We used Heritage Craft Paint and Rolfes Acrylic paint for this project, but any paint you may have will do the job. You can use any colours you'd like to as there are no rules when creating a stone cactus!



FUN PROJECTS

Can painting day

Stretch your emergency stockpile of canned baked beans even further by not dumping the empty cans and rather painting them to use as colourful plant pots.

Get together:

Empty food cans
A hammer
A long nail
Some spray paint in different colours

Note:

We used Rust-Oleum Chalked Ultra Matt and Rust-Oleum Painter's Touch Ultra Cover for our cans.



Remove the labels from the cans and wash the cans well.



Spray paint each can and leave upside down to dry.



Use the hammer and nail to make a few drainage holes in each can.



Fill the cans with potting soil and plant up with veggie seedlings or any other small plants, like a flowering annual.



FUN PROJECTS

Sow microgreens

Microgreens are more than just a garnish, they have a unique flavour that enhance salads and soups, or any dish really; and they look good on the plate too. Besides, they pack a lot of power when it comes to health benefits. Sow anytime, but they do well in late autumn and early winter.

What you need

Seedling tray or Plant propagator or seedling tray and plastic bag
Palm peat
Seedling mix
Liquid fertilizer
A selection of herb and vegetable seeds



Mix together 1-part palm peat and 1-part seedling mix.



Fill the seedling tray to the top with the growing medium.



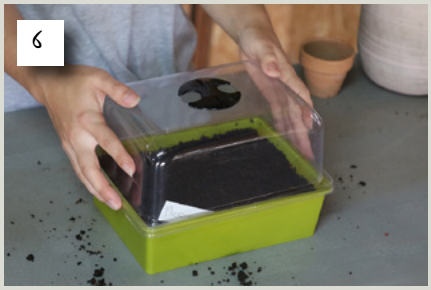
Sow the seeds on top of the medium. Choose a mix of vegetables and herbs that provide a balance of colour, texture and flavour.



Cover lightly with more of the soil mixture and firm down.



If you are using a propagator without drainage holes, water carefully with a mister.



Cover with the lid of a plastic bag to maintain moisture.



TIPS

Feed with a liquid fertiliser to give the seeds a nutrient boost.

Stagger sowing times weekly for a consistent supply of microgreens throughout winter, and harvest as soon as the first edible leaves appear, or leave a few to grow to baby leaf stage for a different flavour profile.

Bulbs are fascinating plants on their own, but they become even more exciting when combined with hydroponics. Growing bulbs in water creates an indoor feature that doubles as a fun science experiment – you can watch every stage as your plants grow!

FUN PROJECTS

Grow bulbs in water



How does it work?

It doesn't take magic to grow bulbs without soil; all you need is a glass, some pebbles, fresh water and whatever bulbs you fancy. Some bulbs grow better indoors than others – try daffodils, hyacinths, or tulips. Bulbs don't need soil to flower because they carry enough nutrients in the bulb to survive, although they won't last as long.

Preparation

Making bulbs flower indoors is the best way to bring yourself out of the end of winter funk, although it does take a bit more work. Bulbs need to be chilled for a few months to mimic the cold conditions of dormancy in winter so that they are tricked into sprouting as soon as they warm up, even if that isn't their usual flowering period. This process is called forcing and it is the best way to produce great results with your bulbs indoors. To chill, place the bulbs in a paper bag in the fridge for three months before planting.



Choose a container to grow in that will be large enough to support the plant when it is fully grown. Glass containers are best for watching the growing process and keeping an eye on the water levels, but you can use any container.



Fill the bottom with pebbles or beads to keep the bulbs in place.



Place the bulbs pointed side up on top of the pebbles and push down slightly.



Add enough water to just cover the bottom of the bulbs.

Place in a room with bright, indirect sunlight and watch them grow!

Brockytony Pebbles are lightweight expanded clay pebbles that come in a variety of colours. You can order these online at www.tanyavisser.com





Order your bulbs online from www.hadeco.co.za



routine matters

Establishing routines, and sticking to them, helps children to feel safe and secure, and also helps to pass the time constructively. This has never been more true than now, with 21 days of lockdown ahead of us.

By Stephen Smith

No, we're not suggesting that you start home-schooling your children. While they are still supposed to be on holiday, let them relax and have fun. But also try to establish a daily routine that allows them to feel secure, and which will help to get things done. Also bear in mind that no one likes the unknown, and because of the huge unknowns facing all of us at the moment, we are all stressed. Routines will help to reduce this stress and its effect on your household and children.



Routines are about being constructive, and that means including everything from chores to meals to exercise to play time and screen time, and obviously gardening.

Wake up times, bedtimes and meals need to be put in place first. You probably have these in place already, but you may need to adapt mealtimes because you're all at home together for lunch. You might also change waking up times because there's no rush to get fed and out of the door to sit in the traffic to work.

Don't fall into the trap of letting children have long naps during the day, because that will change their bedtimes and then their waking up times. Adults still need time together without children, so getting the kids to bed at the normal time is important for everyone.

Once these times have been pencilled into your routine, what else needs to be included? Children, young ones especially, need physical activity, quiet fine motor skills time, reading time, chores, time to be bored and entertain themselves, and family time. We've come up with some suggestions on how to fit most of these things into your gardening schedule!

Now, not even Tanya spends all day every day in her garden (well, not workdays anyway), so what are the best times to garden? When it's comfortable to do so – during hot weather its best to garden in the mornings and evenings when it's cooler.

Some gardening ideas for your routine:

Physical activity

Digging holes
Raking leaves
Mowing the lawn (for older kids. Young ones can help by carting cut grass away in their wagons)
Playing in sand
Potting plants
Watering plants



Fine motor skills

Weeding
Picking up leaves
Picking flowers
Harvesting fruit, veg, herbs
Taking bugs off plants

Reading time

There are some wonderful books and articles about gardening or bugs, written specially for children. You can't buy hard-copy books right now, but you can download them onto a tablet or print them (which is better for kids).

Chores

Putting kitchen waste on the compost heap
Picking up dog poo
Feeding Fido

Being bored

There's nothing wrong with sending your kids out into the garden to entertain themselves. It's amazing how much time my son can spend with just a stick and a few stones. He also loves to build roads in the garden for his toy cars. You just can't be too precious about your plants!

Family time

Almost anything that needs to be done in the garden can be done as a family: Planting, sowing, weeding, raking.
Another suggestion is picnics or braais outdoors, without phones or other screens to distract you. Rediscover the joy of sharing and conversation.

Example routine

7:00	Wake up and get dressed	13:00 – 14:00	Reading or nap time
7:30	Breakfast on the veranda	14:00 – 15:00	Family time
8:30 – 10:00	Physical activity	15:00 – 15:30	Tea and snack
10:00 – 10:30	Tea time	15:30 – 17:00	Physical activity
10:30 – 11:00	Unstructured play	17:00 – 17:30	Chores and tidy up time
11:00 – 12:00	(When it's hot outside)	17:30 – 18:30	TV and supper
	Fine motor skills	18:30	Bath time
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	19:00	Bed time



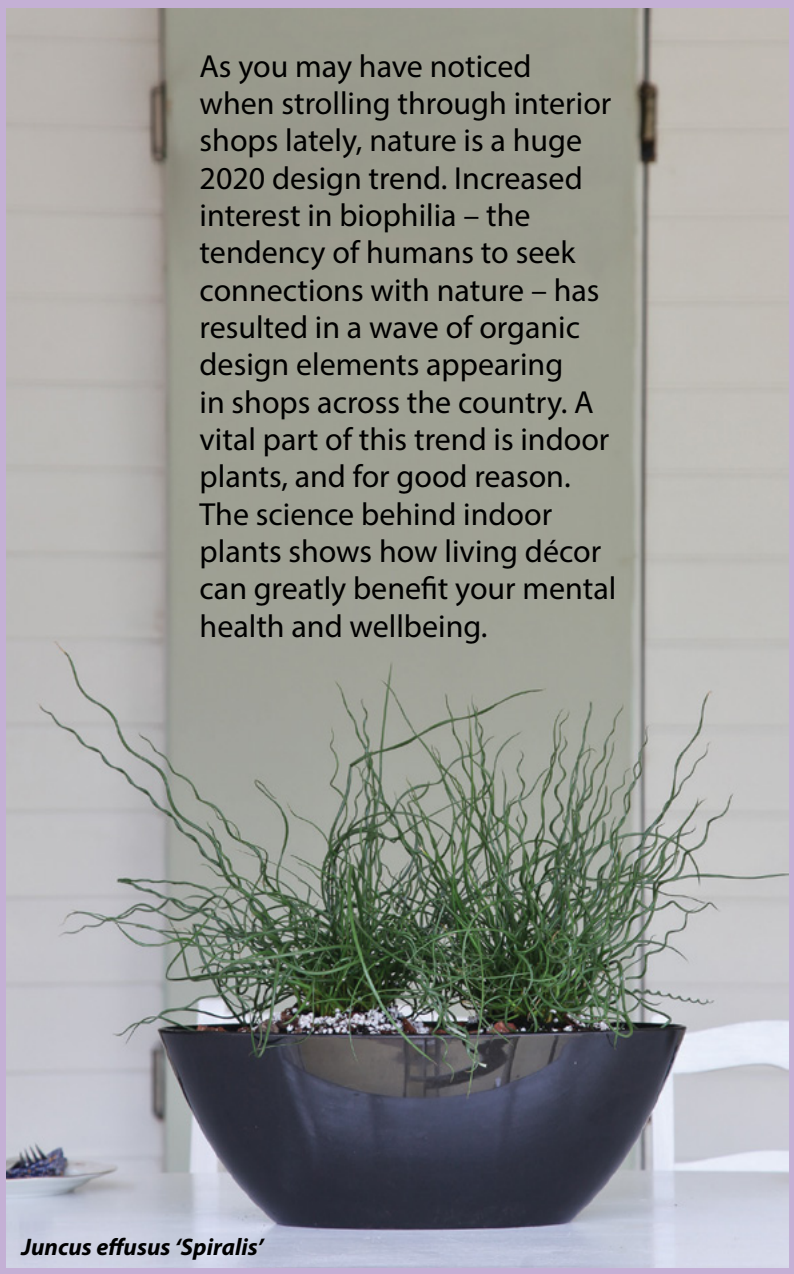


Grow your air clean!

Why we need indoor plants

By Madison Moulton

As you may have noticed when strolling through interior shops lately, nature is a huge 2020 design trend. Increased interest in biophilia – the tendency of humans to seek connections with nature – has resulted in a wave of organic design elements appearing in shops across the country. A vital part of this trend is indoor plants, and for good reason. The science behind indoor plants shows how living décor can greatly benefit your mental health and wellbeing.



Juncus effusus 'Spiralis'

Air quality

In an industrialised world, completely clean air is becoming a luxury. Indoor plants assist in removing from the air toxins related to air pollution, paints or cleaning products. Volatile Organic Compounds (or VOC's) can reach a concentration up to 10 times higher indoors than outdoors because of the harsh chemicals we use. These can have a negative effect on health, but just one indoor plant can help by improving your air quality.



One indoor plant can improve air quality by **25%.**



Five indoor plants can improve air quality by **75%.**



10 indoor plants provide the **maximum** benefits in an average sized room (4m x 5m).

Wellbeing

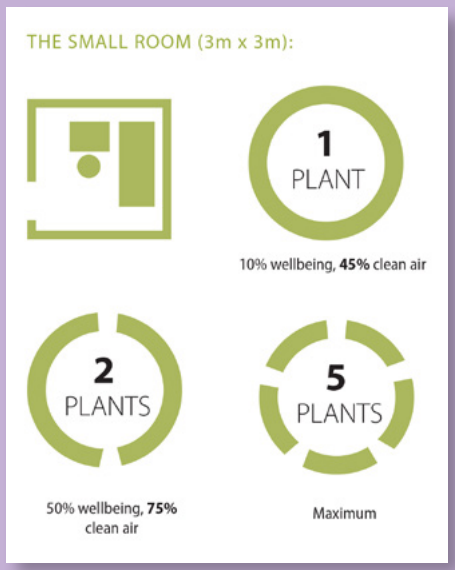
The impact of plants on overall wellbeing is well documented. Indoor plants can create a positive and relaxed space, improving mood, concentration and productivity. The saying 'less is more' definitely does not apply to the benefits of plants indoors, though. One indoor plant has a minor impact on wellbeing, with the benefits increasing exponentially with the number of plants. Five plants can improve wellbeing by up to 60%, but ten plants can help you reap the maximum health benefits. More complexity in size and species also leads to more wellbeing benefits (and design benefits too).

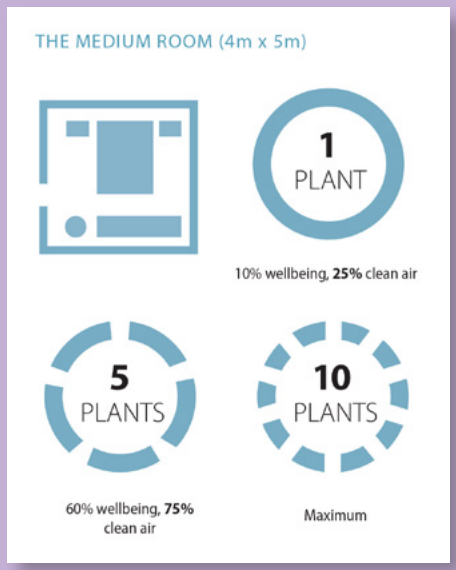


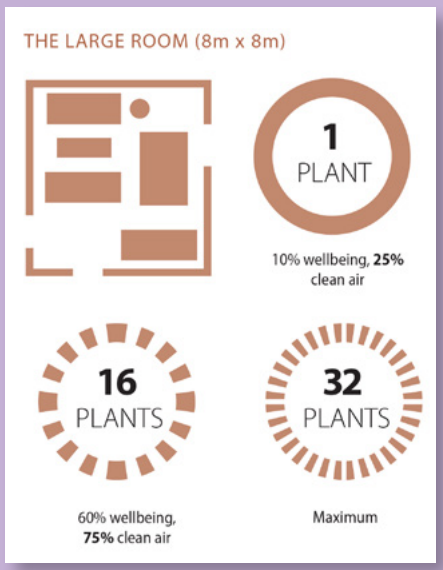


How many plants do you need?

Different rooms have different requirements. By spreading your indoor plants throughout your home you can achieve clean air and positive benefits in all rooms rather than concentrating them in one. These amounts are based on medium sized plants of about 30cm in height. The general rule of thumb is the bigger the leaves and roots, the greater the benefits.







Houseplants for every room in the home

Let there be light

Just placing your plants in bright natural light already enhances their beauty, making your plants the star of the show. This works best with plants that have shiny leaves to reflect sunlight or with very large leaves to capture brightness. Where indoor plants can brighten a room in the daytime, at night they can be used to create some drama. Moveable lights can be positioned to enhance the shadows created by your indoor plants to foster that jungle feeling. Trailing plants can be placed around hanging lights to create a natural kind of lampshade, and can dim strong lighting for a better ambiance.



By Madison Moulton and Anna Celliers



Care for it:

Keep the soil moist, and if worried about a lack of humidity, place the pot on a saucer filled with gravel chips and a little water (the plant must not stand in the water), and keep the already shiny foliage dust-free.

The Kitchen

Tropical in the kitchen

The exotic-looking *Anthurium*, which once grew only in sub-tropical gardens and hothouses, has now been introduced to the flowering houseplant market in the form of compact hybrids with great flowering potential. Don't look at the shiny foliage, the heart-shaped spathes and upright spadixes that make up the flower and think, "Boy, this is going to be a challenge to keep alive!" If you stick to a few basic requirements, like high humidity (which there will be in the kitchen if you cook regularly) and bright light (but not direct sunlight) you have nothing to fear!



Windowsill herbs

There's nothing more pleasing than a sunny windowsill full of herbs. North-facing windows are particularly good sun traps, especially if you have a broad windowsill that can hold pots of mature herbs. The ideal spot is one that gets sun for about five or six hours a day, preferably from the morning onwards so that the soil heats up. If your windowsill gets even more sun just make sure that the soil does not dry.

Good culinary herbs are: mint, parsley, thyme, basil, chives, chervil, sage, oregano, marjoram, rocket, and salad burnet. Otherwise, base your choice of herbs around those that would not grow too big in the garden.

Care for it:

Feed every 2 weeks with a liquid fertiliser. Don't over water. Once a week should be enough. Keep the soil feeling slightly damp, but not sodden or bone dry. Use the herbs and when they start looking sickly, turf them out and buy or grow a new pot.

The Living Room

Attraction on the coffee table

Succulents and cacti are sexy, there's no doubt about it, and the carrion plant (*Stapelia*) is no exception, with its thorny and fleshy fingers in dull green, sometimes turning into a rusty shade of red. Even in nature, where it lurks in the dappled shade of dry and arid underbrush, it is a short-lived plant. It is strongly associated with insects, as it uses its bad-smelling flowers to attract pollinating flies. Perhaps it isn't a good idea to have a plant with a foul-smelling flower on one's coffee table, but then again, it can become a great conversational topic and earn you kudos for being really 'green' where fly control (or pollination) is concerned. If the scent of the flower repulses you, simply cut them off after they have opened (you have to see these beauties first!). You can then enjoy the rest of the anatomy of this beautiful plant in odour-free peace.



Care for it:

Water very sparingly when it starts to look really shrivelled.



Pokon Leafshine is an easy, instant, non-messy quick drying formula that gives a natural long lasting shine. www.hadeco.co.za



Sansevieria trifasciata* 'Laurentii'** (variegated snake plant): Nicknamed 'mother-in-law's tongue' for its pointed leaves, ***Sansevieria trifasciata can provide a structural contrast to the softer indoor plants. An added bonus is that they require very little water and medium sunlight.

Plants are known for fitting into almost any colour scheme, but do we really want to just 'fit them in'? Every indoor plant should be the leading lady, not relegated to a supporting role, and the best way to achieve this is to focus your interior colour scheme on the plants themselves.

Spathiphyllum (peace lily): This plant was declared the best living air filter in the world by the NASA Clean Air study! The shiny leaves and stark white flowers pair well with modern interiors. Keep the soil moist and place in low light – great for bathrooms or bedrooms.

The Bathroom



Zamioculcas zamiifolia

Guzmania

Plectranthus ciliatus



Spathiphyllum

It is never going to get prime position on most builders' plans but the bathroom, while still fulfilling its traditional role, can be adapted so that it takes on the feel of a relaxing spa. Incorporating plants into its décor is a way to add life and a sense of tranquillity.



Cyclamen

Cyclamens are typical cool-weather-flowering houseplants, adding cheer to any indoor room. Place them in bright, indirect light and water from below when the soil medium starts feeling dry to the touch. Look out for the new **'Pipoca'.**



Adiantum raddianum (maidenhair fern)

A bathroom, with its high humidity, is the perfect place to grow lush and tropical ferns, provided that there is good light and good air circulation too.



Greening your office

Studies have shown that plants can improve productivity amongst employees, reduce absences due to poor office environment and improve the general mood of employees whilst at work.

Investing in office plants is an investment in your business. However, plants do need to be looked after – a tired, dusty, sporadically watered, never fed plant is not going to inspire anyone. If you can afford it, hire a professional office plant company that will feed and water your office plants and make sure they are always in optimal health and in the right position to thrive.







Beaucarnea recurvata

More reasons to have office plants

Several studies carried out by respected organisations and universities on the benefits of office plants have resulted in some interesting observations.

- In one study, participants were 12% more productive and less stressed in an environment with plants.
- Greening the workplace is an effective method of promoting employee satisfaction, and surveys show the positive effect plants have on people.
- With proper selection and placement, plants can lower heating and cooling costs by as much as 20%. In addition, plant transpiration releases moisture, contributing to a humidity level that matches the recommended human comfort range of 30 to 60%.
- Plants cost less than some expensive décor choices, yet the perception is that interior planting is more expensive looking and more welcoming to visitors.
- 'Sick Building Syndrome', a serious problem in sealed office buildings and a syndrome studied extensively, is particularly evident when there is no way for fresh outdoor air to replace the stale air within the building. Some plants have the ability to absorb toxins out of the air, purifying it and reducing the effects of this syndrome dramatically.
- Annoyances and distractions caused by office noise can be reduced by several decibels by using plant 'hedges' around the workplace.

Greening your desk project

Desk terrarium

A living landscape contained in glass is the perfect way to begin greening your desk. It requires very little maintenance once planted up as it creates its own little eco-system. For this terrarium, we used a cake stand with a domed lid and planted it up with ***Fittonia*** spp., ***Soleirolia soleirolii*** (peace-in-the-home) and echeverias. You can use just about any container made of glass or clear plastic for a terrarium. It is an interesting way to give a new life to an old jar, water jug (with a lid), fish tank, vase, expired light bulb or storage jar, or any other transparent container that can be closed or semi-closed and that can hold soil and plants. When it comes to choosing suitably-sized plants, even one as small as moss qualifies.



Our Top 10 indoor plants

By Madison Moulton

10

Fittonia – nerve plant

The nerve plant is a popular compact houseplant named for its trademark deep veins with contrasting colours in silver, pink, white and green. It is slightly tricky to care for as it requires filtered sunlight/part shade and very high humidity, but that makes them a perfect fit for indoor terrariums.





9

Phlebodium aureum – hare-foot fern

This fern's unusual blue-green leaves and low light requirements make it a popular choice for fern lovers. It grows well in areas like bathrooms or bedrooms but does need a bit more maintenance to create a high-humidity environment. Keep a spray bottle near the pot and mist once a day or place it near the shower for a regular steam.



8

Dracaena 'Lemon Lime'

Often confused for a palm tree, this plant has a tropical aesthetic and long lifespan when well taken care of. Place in high-light areas, even direct sunlight if you have it, and water every 4-5 days in summer and twice a month in winter. Use this plant to bring an exotic feel to your living room or dining room.



7

Bromeliad

Another group of tropical plants bringing an exotic touch to your indoors is members of the bromeliad family. Some are short-lived but are luckily relatively low maintenance, requiring medium to bright light and watering once a week. This plant is loved for its variety of colours, ensuring there is something for everyone.



6

Peperomia – radiator plant

People have fallen in love with peperomias due to their huge variety of ornamental leaves in every strange shape, texture and colour imaginable. They are also slow-growing and low maintenance, tolerating a bit of neglect from houseplant beginners. Peperomias are the perfect choice for budding houseplant collectors – the same care requirements for a wide range of styles.





Asplenium nidus – bird's nest fern

5

The next fern on the list is the dramatic bird's nest fern with long textured leaves that make it a stunning indoor feature plant. As with other ferns, mist regularly or place in a steamy bathroom and avoid watering the centre of the plant to prevent rotting. Its natural rainforest environment makes the bird's nest fern a perfect pairing with bromeliads and orchids.

Anthurium

4

Anthuriums have seen a surge in popularity and are largely grown for their flower spathes, the colourful waxy modified leaf that makes this plant unique. They also tolerate a number of conditions but grow most successfully in bright indirect sunlight. While the iconic red colour is the most common, there is a kaleidoscope of colour options to choose from.



3 *Zamioculcas zamiifolia* – zz plant

Possibly the most Instagram-worthy houseplant on the list comes in at number 3, the zz plant, and for good reason. This plant is drought tolerant, can survive low light conditions and can withstand a fair bit of neglect. It is also resistant to many diseases and insects. Join the #houseplantsofinstagram family with your own zz plant.





2 *Ficus lyrata* – fiddle-leaf fig

You cannot stop by a nursey without coming across the insanely popular fiddle-leaf fig, named for the shape of the massive leaves. With some bright filtered light, regular watering and a repotting every once in a while, this houseplant can grow into a towering feature tree that will amaze other indoor gardeners.



1 *Sansevieria* – snake plant

Snake plants tend to divide houseplant lovers for their tough appearance, but they are number 1 on this list for good reason – they are almost impossible to kill. Sansevierias can handle almost any light conditions and can go without water for a couple of weeks. They are also easy to propagate and come with a few striking variegations and leaf shapes to fit modern, edgy interiors. As number 1 on our favourites list, it should be your number 1 indoor plant if you are just starting out.

Garden Gym

You may not be able to go to the gym today, but you can get a good workout in the privacy of your own backyard and without a membership fee.



Before you start...

Gardening in overdrive can cause injury, muscle spasm and stiffness. Before starting your garden gym session, warm up those cold muscles by stretching a bit – it gives you time to decide what you're going to tackle first. Vary your garden workout with different actions like pruning, raking, sweeping, mowing, digging and weeding, and spend about 15 minutes on each activity to work out different muscles. Do some stretching and limbering exercises before moving on to the next action.

Weeding, planting and digging

The wrong way

When weeding flowerbeds or planting annuals or bulbs, don't bend down with your nether regions sticking up in the air. Apart from the fact that this might be a scary sight for others, you will punish your lower back relentlessly and unnecessarily.

The right way

- Squat down with bent knees, pull your tummy in and keep your back straight – you can do a few leapfrog moves between flowerbeds too.
- To sit on your knees while working is also fine. Some will say that being in this position while digging and weeding with hand tools is similar to picking up weights.
- Digging with a large garden fork is hard work, and if you keep at it for too long you will pay the price! Not only will you damage your soil structure, but also your lower back. But sometimes you've just got to do it, and it strengthens the skeleton and gives practically every muscle in your body a good workout – remember to keep your tummy muscles pulled in tightly while digging.

Muscles exercised with these actions include those in the stomach, thighs, calves, bum, back and all of those in the arms. With regular leapfrogs your heartbeat will increase and your thigh muscles will become strong and firm.





Hot tip

Use a kneepad to kneel on, or cover the knees of your old gardening jeans with thick layers of silicone gel (allow it to dry first before kneeling).



Hot tips

Use garden gloves when raking or sweeping as doing it bare-handed can cause terrible blisters. When putting down a rake remember that the sharp tines should always face downwards.

Raking and sweeping

The wrong way

Don't assume a bent position and don't rush the job. Refrain from making sudden sideway movements, which can hurt your back, or to stretch out too far to reach another leaf. Rather move along with the tool. Some rakes and garden brooms are so heavy and uncomfortable to use that it tires you out after the first few movements. Choose lightweight tools with handles that are comfortable for you to use.

The right way

- Stand up straight, pull your tummy in and bend your knees when raking fallen leaves, picking up garden refuse to compost, or sweeping the paving clean.
- It is rumoured that raking and sweeping exercise the same muscles as a rowing machine in a gym. You will feel the muscles working in your upper body, tummy, shoulders and arms. If you bend down regularly to pick up stuff, you will also feel the stretch in your calves and thighs.



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Garden Tool Set - 3pcs
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- Gloves

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Trimming, pruning and sawing

The wrong way

Rome wasn't built in a day, so you should allow yourself more than one session to handle these actions. It is extremely hard work that can tire you out and cause muscle pain – the plants that are in need of pruning will not know the difference!

The right way

- You use a lot of energy when pruning something like a hedge, as you are moving non-stop, exercising your shoulder muscles, arms and hands. You will also find that your heart beats faster and you are short of breath.
- Gym equipment doesn't come cheap, and neither do good pruning tools. Buy the best, care for them, keep the blades sharpened, and have electrical or fuel-driven pruning tools regularly serviced by professionals.
- When pruning, take short rest periods and wear gloves to protect your hands.
- Because low hedging requires bending down, straighten your back every now and again to relax the constant strain on it.
- High hedging and a rickety ladder can cause you months in traction! In this case call upon a fellow lockdown inmate who also needs a bit of garden gym – and take turns holding the ladder, please!
- Hot tip: When pruning or sawing off anything above your head, wear sunglasses or safety glasses to keep small sticks or insects from landing in your eyes.

High quality chainsaw

The POWXQG4060 is a powerful petrol chainsaw with high-quality Oregon chain and 350mm bar for efficient operating. Thanks to the easy-start system, you can start the engine effortlessly with only one pull of the starter handle, while the primer bulb will help to fill the carburettor with fuel. Once started, the choke automatically switches off. The chain lubrication is automatically controlled for a smooth supply. The chain brake reduces the risk of injury due to kickback, and to improve the operator's comfort this machine is equipped with an anti-vibration system. It is also supplied with a high-quality canvas bag for storage.



Autumn clean up made easy

The POWDPG7525 cordless leaf blower gives you the power and freedom to go anywhere in your garden. Equipped with a brushless motor, your comfort is guaranteed by low vibrations and a motor that needs no maintenance. On top of that, the high-efficiency motor maximises the run time and the motor life.

The leaf blower blows leaves at a maximum speed of 185km/h with its turbo button, and a handy speed-lock lever allows you to operate the leaf blower without having to hold the trigger during use. The large blowing tube is detachable for compact storage. Makes use of the 20V/40V charger and the 40V Dual Power battery.



www.klbengineering.co.za



This wheelbarrow booster is easy to attach and triples the capacity of your wheelbarrow. www.tanyavisser.com

General tips on being safe

- Drink a lot of water while garden gymming.
- Keep a hat on your head and plaster yourself with sunscreen.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes and shoes.
- Never wear scarves, jewellery or any loose pieces of clothing that can get caught or stuck into garden gym equipment like power tools.
- Be careful of rusted nails and slippery pathways covered in moss.



A tub trug makes gardening easier – order online from www.tanyavisser.com

Mowing and wheelbarrow carting

The wrong way

Mowing a lawn on a tractor-like machine with a comfortable seat and music from your Smartphone in your ears will give you the same amount of exercise as sitting idly on the patio. And pushing an overloaded wheelbarrow with difficulty just because you are too lazy to cart a few extra loads will take its toll on your back when you are in your dotage.

The right way

- Mowing a medium-size lawn with a push mower has the same value as a fast walk around a few neighbourhood blocks, or spending some time on a boring treadmill in the gym. The difference with garden gymming is that you will have trees and flowers around you for company, while your back, leg and arm muscles are working hard and your heart is beating like a drum.
- Always check out the lawn for 'booby traps' like stones, chewed dog bones and small toys before mowing, by walking around briskly – this is also in mental preparation for the job of getting the thing started and running smoothly!
- Adjust the machine's handles to fit your height so that you can walk upright with your tummy pulled in. A bent mowing session will hurt your neck and back.

Hot tips

Wear sturdy shoes with closed toes, or you might lose a few. Never pull a heavily loaded wheelbarrow as you can lose your balance if it falls over – they are made to be pushed!



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Grow a square-foot medicine chest

The square-foot gardening technique is perfect for herbs with medicinal properties, which don't take up too much space but will keep you healthy.

By Stephen Smith



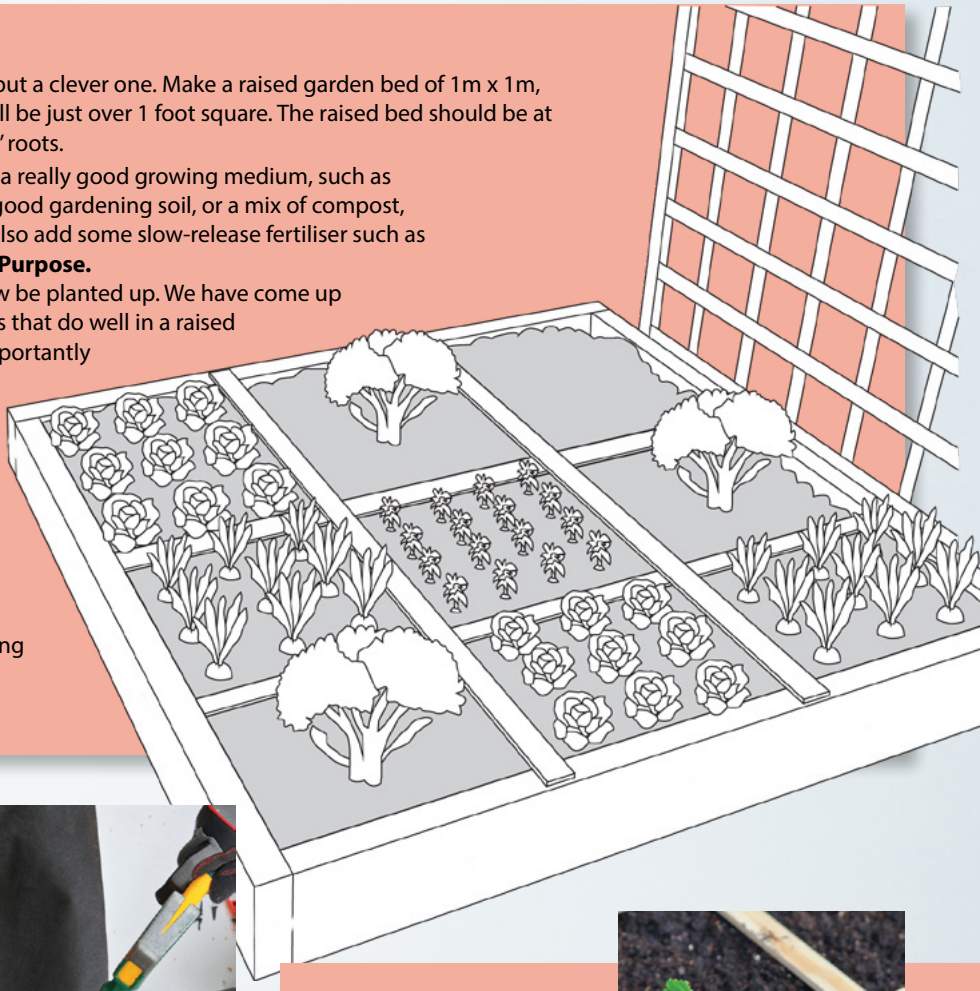
Square-foot gardening is a simple technique, but a clever one. Make a raised garden bed of 1m x 1m, and divide it into nine equal blocks, which will be just over 1 foot square. The raised bed should be at least 15cm deep, to accommodate the plants' roots.



www.atlanticfertilisers.co.za

Fill the raised bed with a really good growing medium, such as a mix of compost and good gardening soil, or a mix of compost, vermiculite and peat. Also add some slow-release fertiliser such as **Atlantic Bio Ganic All Purpose.**

Each square can now be planted up. We have come up with a list of nine plants that do well in a raised container, but more importantly have significant health benefits for you and your family. We also tried to make sure that the plants all have another use, be it ornamental or culinary, so that you don't only get to enjoy them when you're feeling poorly.





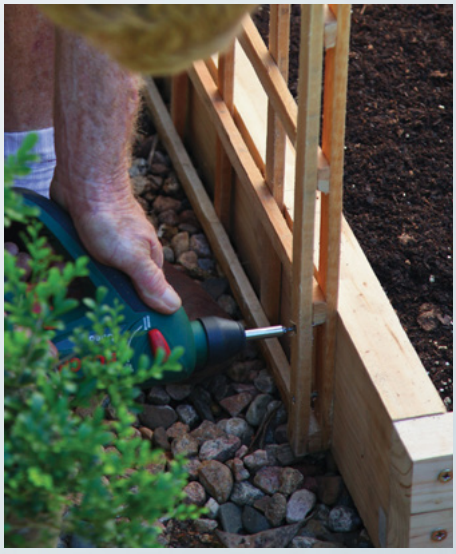


The advantages of a square-foot garden are that you can fit a lot of plants into a small space, you can easily keep an eye on your plants and any weeds or pests, and it is easy to keep track of watering.









Plants you can use

Sage



This wise old herb is a staple in French and Italian cooking (try some sage burnt butter sauce on gnocchi!), but it is also a powerful herb in the treatment of colds and coughs, and does a great job in loosening mucus in the respiratory tract. It is an antiseptic, antiviral, antifungal and antimicrobial, and can also be used to treat skin complaints.

Make an infusion to use as a gargle or mouthwash for when you have a sore throat, tonsillitis or mouth ulcers. Also remember that using a medicinal mouthwash is a good idea even when you're healthy, to give your immune system some relief from fighting all the germs that come in via your mouth.

Thyme



Thyme is one of my favourite herbs to use in the kitchen – I put it in everything from roast chicken to pizzas and pastas. But I also love to make thyme tea, especially with lemon thyme, and add a dash of honey. It tastes fresh and earthy, but it also does your body a world of good.

As Mick Jagger said, "Thyme is on my side…". It works well to alleviate sore throats and treats the symptoms of colds, coughs and even allergic rhinitis. One of its most important benefits is that it boosts the body's ability to produce white blood cells, which are what fight infection.

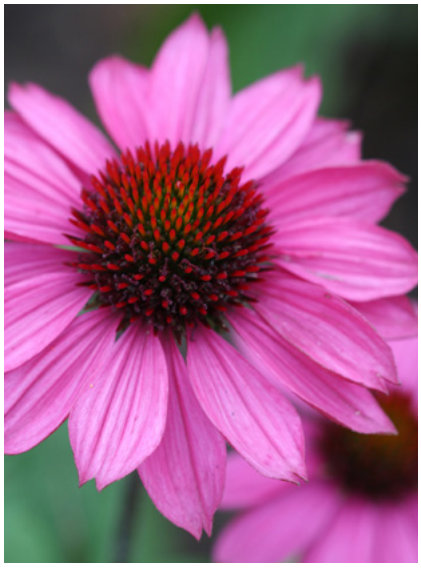
It can also be used to treat skin complaints and will even help sort out that hangover.

Lemon grass

A square foot of lemon grass at the back of your bed will be quite a statement as the strap-like leaves can reach 1m high. The plant also likes to be cut back, so you can harvest the stems constantly for use in Asian curries and stir-fries and it will keep producing more. From a health point of view lemon grass is brilliant – lemon grass tea, made from the leaves, can reduce fevers and alleviate stress (which we all need these days!), along with many other uses. The oil is also useful, and safe to use as a carrier oil, be it for its antimicrobial, antibacterial or even antidepressant effects.



Echinacea



Echinacea is one of the best things to use to fight our old nemesis, the common cold. While we don't really know how it works and what it does, it can be incredibly effective if taken at the onset of an infection. It lessens both the duration and severity of symptoms of colds and flu.

Turmeric



The turmeric plant looks a bit like that of ginger, to which it is related, but there is no mistaking the golden rhizome and fragrant scent of turmeric. It also happens to be one of the trendiest healthy foods at the moment with an almost endless list of benefits. Obviously you can add it to curries, Indian or those from South-east Asia, but we like to use it in 'golden milk'. This panacea is made by heating milk in a saucepan along with some grated turmeric, some grated ginger, a little cinnamon and a teaspoon or so of honey. Once it is hot, let it simmer for 10 minutes until full of flavour, colour and fragrance. Strain and drink. While there are claims that turmeric can do virtually everything your body needs to be done, there is no doubt that it does boost your immunity.

Nasturtium



Add the leaves and flowers of nasturtium to a salad, and you'll be packing vitamin C into your diet. The peppery flavour is wonderful on cold days, but the real value is that the leaves and flowers have antimicrobial functions and can be used to treat bronchitis and bacterial infections of the upper respiratory tract. You can also make a tea from the leaves and flowers, to be drunk or used as a gargle for sore throats.

Yarrow



Yarrow deserves to be planted at the back of your square foot garden bed just to grace you with its beautiful flowers, but it also packs quite a medicinal punch. It can be used to stop bleeding from wounds or nosebleeds, but can also be drunk as a tea to bring down fevers and dull pain. Another use is to rub the essential oil onto your chest for coughs.

Parsley



My mother and grandmother would never be without a parsley plant. True, they used it mainly as a garnish or in scrambled eggs, but it is also incredibly nutritious, filled with magnesium, iron, potassium and vitamins A, B and C. It's hard to eat a lot of parsley due to its strong flavour, but parsley tea is quite pleasant. Interestingly, the roots and particularly the seeds are more powerful in terms of medicinal properties.

Ginger



It's no secret that ginger is an incredibly versatile culinary spice, used in everything from ginger beer to stir-fries and teas, but it also has a wealth of health benefits. Its primary use is as a warming tea that quells bouts of nausea, but it also helps with respiratory tract infections, digestive issues and poor circulation. It has also been used to lower high cholesterol.



Herbal Teas

The best herbs for delicious, healthy, herbal teas

By Alice Spenser-Higgs

There is nothing as comforting as a cup of tea, and that applies equally to herbal teas. Herbal teas should be delicious. Just because they are healthy doesn't mean they should taste vile. The secret lies in choosing the right herbs, making the tea correctly and not being a purist. Add honey, fruit, veggie or lemon juice if it improves the flavour. In the morning a cup of herbal tea cleanses the system. At lunchtime it may be a useful pick-me-up or act as a digestive after a rich dinner. A final cuppa just before bed helps dissolve the stress of the day.



Get up and go...

Parsley as a tea is a very effective cleansing herb because it detoxes the kidneys, contains vitamins A and C and also boosts the immune system. It has a clean, earthy taste and is best combined with honey, apple or even carrot juice. Parsley grows in sun or semi-shade and needs rich, moist well-drained soil.



Lemon verbena has the strongest lemon taste and fragrance of all the lemony herbs. Instead of starting the day with hot water and lemon, try lemon verbena tea. For extra flavour add pineapple sage or apple mint leaves.

Verbena grows best in full sun, likes a light soil that drains well and should be watered regularly. It is sensitive to cold and will lose its leaves in winter but can be cut back in spring and it will sprout again.



Liquid lunch...

An energy boosting tea is a combination of **rosemary** and **ginger**. Both alleviate digestive problems and stimulate the circulation while rosemary also acts as an anti-depressant. Add honey for taste. Adventurous types can add a bit of chilli!

Rosemary is a slow-growing bushy perennial that is drought tolerant and frost hardy. It does best in full sun, in light soil that drains well.



Pineapple sage doesn't have any medicinal benefits but its fresh pineapple flavour is delicious and refreshing. Make an iced tea with pineapple sage and add mint julep for an extra punch! Pineapple sage is a bushy perennial that grows 1.5m high and wide, with spikes of red flowers and lime green leaves. Grow it in full sun, in a position that is sheltered from frost. It requires moist but well-drained soil.

4 tips for perfect teas

- Use only the healthiest, freshest leaves and bruise them slightly before pouring over the just-boiled water. This helps release their flavour.
- China or glass utensils are the best, not aluminium. The easiest way to make more than one cup is with a glass coffee plunger. When the herbs have steeped enough, push the plunger down; it acts as a strainer.
- Use the right quantity of herbs. For a single cup you'll only need a short sprig of leaves and one or two flowers, if available. For a teapot or plunger use one third herbs to two thirds water.
- While infusing, cover the cup to prevent the herb's volatile oils from evaporating as they give the herb its tonic or therapeutic action. Strain and drink.

Why is my tea bitter?

Herbal teas become bitter if infused for too long. The general rule is five minutes or less, depending on taste and the type of herb. Strongly aromatic herbs like rosemary and lavender need even less time. It should be just long enough to impart their lovely, perfumed flavour.



All mints require the same kind of growing conditions: moist, rich soil in a partially shaded spot. The plant dies down in winter but will come up again in spring.

Fine dining digestives...

Mint teas are wonderfully refreshing after a heavy meal. Take your pick from the following flavours:

Garden mint and **spearmint** are the two most popular mints. They have deep green, very aromatic leaves, with the latter having a more spearmint flavour.
Ginger mint has variegated gold-and-green ginger-scented leaves while pineapple mint has green-and-cream variegated leaves with a strong pineapple scent.
Mint julep has sweetly scented leaves and a striking fresh flavour.





Fennel is delicious if you like the taste of aniseed. It is a digestive herb as well as a liver tonic (to offset all that red wine at dinner). It is also a marvellous slimming herb that helps with weight loss. Don't drink more than two cups a day if you are drinking it for dieting reasons.

Fennel does best in well-drained or sandy soil, and prefers a sunny, sheltered position in winter.

Tip from Phyto-Force

Healing the Natural Way

Common chickweed, ***Stellaria media*** is a versatile food and edible plant, great in salads and can be added to omelettes, soups and more. It is good for chest infections, asthma and other lung disorders. Abundant in vitamins and minerals, particularly vitamin C.





www.healthyliving-herbs.co.za



Sweet dreams...

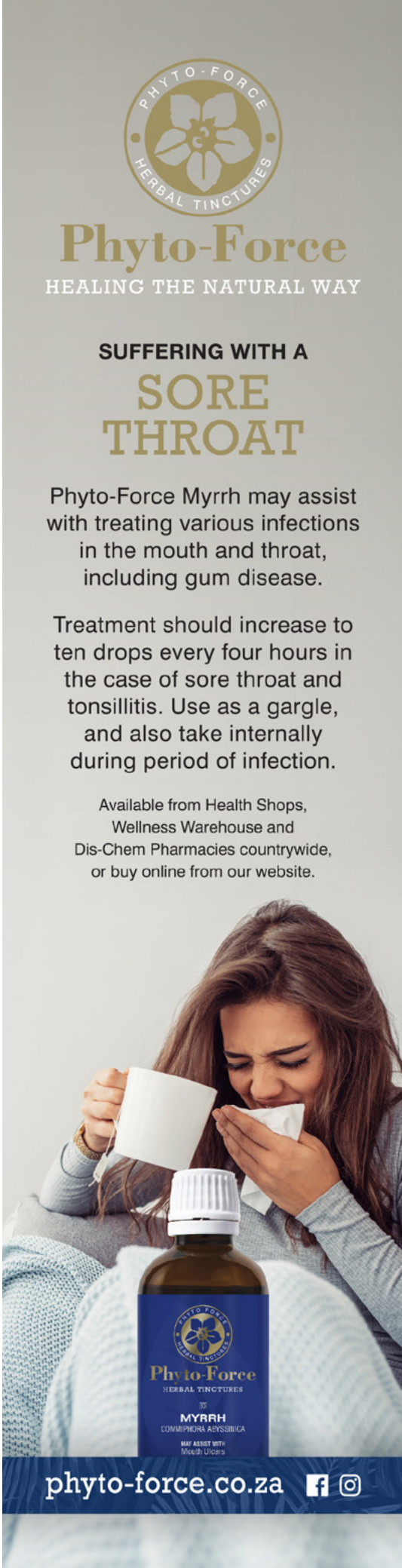
Chamomile, lavender, lemon balm and rose geranium are soothing, scented herbs producing a light, perfumed tea, either on their own or as a delicious combination. Sip the tea just before you go to bed.

Chamomile, specifically the flowers, help to relieve stress, anxiety and digestive problems, when made into a tea. It is an attractive low-growing perennial groundcover with fine green leaves and white daisy-like flowers with deep yellow centres. It grows in full sun and likes soil that drains well.



Lemon balm is an excellent digestive and can also be sipped after a meal. The leaves have a delicate taste so you need to use more than normal, compared to strong culinary herbs. Crush or bruise the fresh leaves to release the lemony flavour and add honey for extra flavour.

Lemon balm is a low-growing perennial (30cm) that grows in moist, fertile soil and does best if it can receive morning sun and afternoon shade.



Garden creative!

With more time on our hands than usual, and heaps of 'junk' piling up while we're cleaning and organising our homes, why not use some of those things to create quirky garden art and pretty displays?

From kitchen to garden

We have some sharp ideas for your recycling, and remember: if it is hollow and it can hold soil, you can plant something in it…



Succulent pie

Succulents like echeverias and graptopetalums can be planted unrooted in any container, like this recycled old pan, to be displayed as a table centrepiece.



Cake tin plant holders

Epiphytes like bromeliads don't need much soil, if any, to sit pretty in the top tin. Growing below is the indigenous asparagus fern – another tough plant that you can dig up from your garden and divide.

Tip from Phyto-Force

Healing the Natural Way

Basil is an excellent source for Vitamins A, C, K, manganese and iron as well as magnesium and omega- fatty acids. It is a good antioxidant and has anti-inflammatory properties.





Cat on a hot tin stove

Even an old stove can be a growing place for a humble plant like a vygie.



Stove as a plant shelf

Another way to use an old stove creatively.



Tea time!

The old enamel kettle is boiling over with growth!



Where is Grandma?

Grandma's old bowl that she used for kneading her bread dough in now has pride of place on the veranda, filled with pelargoniums galore!



Any colanders about?

The handy colander, or pot you can make holes in for drainage, can also be a container for planting just about anything.



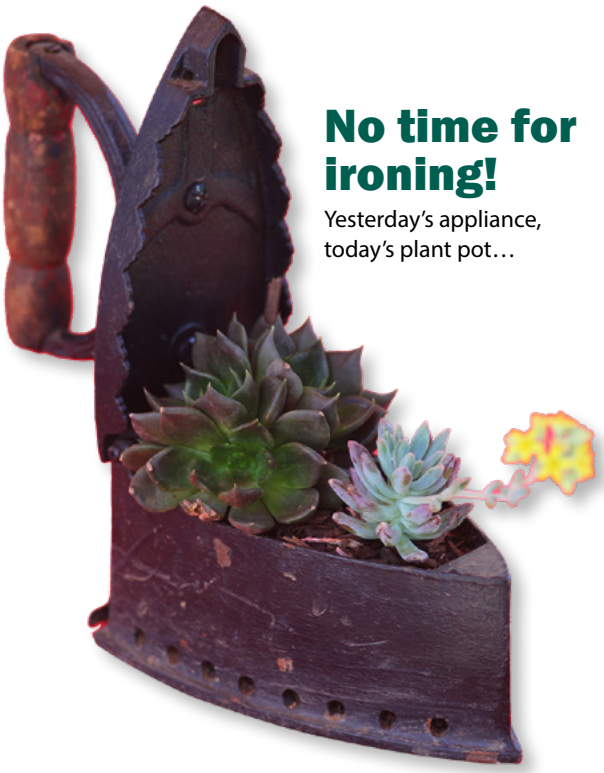
Even the old wash trough is good...

Once we all had these wash troughs. If you still do, display it somewhere in the garden against a wall and plant it full of anything you can find. The fuller the better!



Odds and ends...

Old household goods like tins and jugs are perfect homes for good plants, like rooted spekboom (***Portulacaria afra***) plants you want to grow on.



No time for ironing!

Yesterday's appliance, today's plant pot…

Garden couture

It's time to toss out all the old clothes and shoes you are never going to wear again…

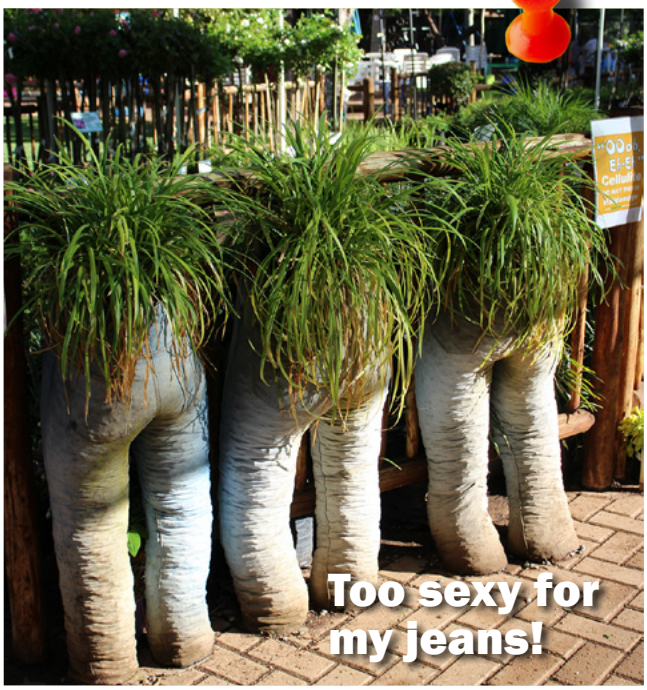


These boots are made for growing!

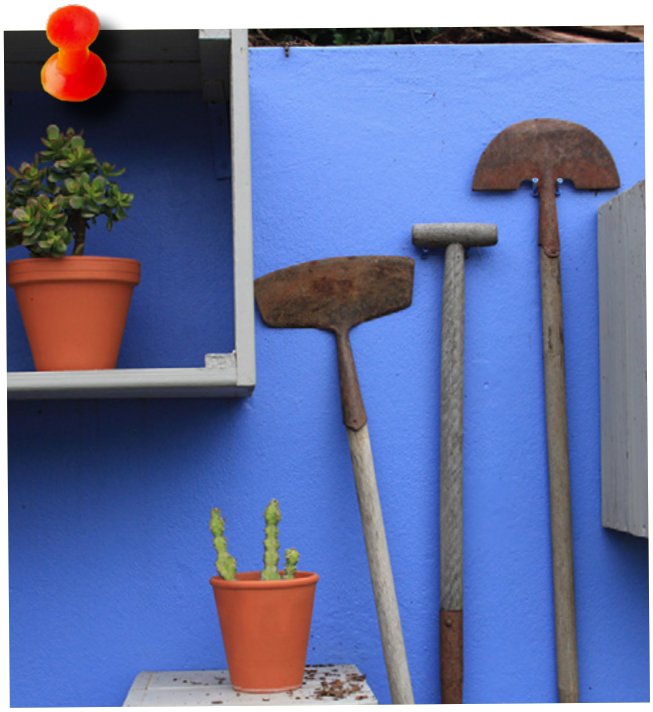
Old work boots are perfect vessels for planting all kind of plants in, because if they have worked hard enough they should have a lot of holes in them and thus good natural drainage…







Let the neighbours know you've lost enough weight at last and no longer fit into your old jeans. Display them over the fence filled with garden soil and a few ornamental grasses you have pilfered from your garden beds. Doing this might make them miss you less…



Recycled from the garden shed

Garden tools and other gadgets that have worked hard for you for years can be displayed artistically to give vertical interest in the garden.



Wheelbarrow on pension

Wheelbarrows not in use anymore can become a 'garden' all on their own if parked where everybody can see them and planted up with flowers, herbs and veggie seedlings. The old wooden ladder in the background is now a handy shelf for a collection of potted plants.



Build a clay pot man

If you have a lot of clay pots lying around, add string and sticks to fashion clay pot men. If you have any craft paint lying around, you can let the kids paint them first – they love doing it!



Perfect hedges

A hedge can be an asset in any garden - especially those with formal designs. However, they can also become a nightmare if not treated properly.

Pruning hedges

Prune or shear hedges all year round to maintain their shape – the less volume that is removed at any one pruning session, the healthier it is for the plants. All hedges should be shaped so that the bottom is slightly wider than the top, as this allows the sun to reach the bottom, thus negating the possibility of bare or dead patches at the base. When trimming a hedge, it is easier to start on the sides, which is easier to keep straight. Use builders' line and pegs across the top of the hedge to make sure it is kept perfectly straight in this region. There is nothing better looking than a straight hedge, and nothing worse than a wavy one. You can also invest in a wooden or metal frame to ensure that the hedge remains uniform in shape. Prune regularly every four to six weeks during the growing season, removing as little new growth as possible, while still maintaining the required shape and dimensions.



Before starting to prune, you need to ensure that your pruning tools are disinfected, clean, sharp, and designed for the specific task at hand. This minimises damage and bruising to pruned stems.



The STIHL HSA 25 Cordless shrub shears is a handy hedge helper to maintain small hedges. www.stihl.co.za



STIHL has a range of cordless, electric and petrol hedge trimmers for any type of hedge. www.stihl.co.za

Pest patrol

Invite beneficial bugs into the garden and ask pesky bugs to leave

Snails



These marauding molluscs are nocturnal by nature, emerging under the cover of darkness to feast on decaying matter, living plants, flowers and fruits. Evidence of slug or snail damage is that the leaves have large ragged holes chewed in them, scalloped-edges, or seedlings have been completely stripped of their leaves.

Control slugs and snails by searching at night with a torch and drop them in a bowl of soapy water. Another way is to form barriers like eggshells or oats, or ring the plants under attack with a copper screen. The copper reacts with the slime the slugs and snail produce, and creates an electric charge which deters them from crossing.

A range of chemicals, and baits can be bought from garden centres to deal with slugs; most are extremely effective.



www.efekto.co.za

Aphids



One of the most common and easily identifiable garden insect pests is aphids, also known as greenfly or blackfly, depending on their colour. Aphids attack most garden plants and are usually found in large colonies on the new growth tips, flower buds or on succulent foliage. They are particularly prevalent during early spring and into the summer season, sucking the sap from plants and causing malformed flowers and foliage. Many other plant diseases are transmitted by these wily little creatures.

Aphids are mostly immobile, but some do grow wings when colonies become overcrowded or host plants begin to show signs of stress and wilting. They are usually easy to control with one of the numerous different insecticides registered for use on these pests. However, there are also various different insects that prey on aphids, including ladybirds and praying mantis.



www.proteksa.co.za

Citrus psylla



Citrus psylla causes raised, pock-like swellings on the upper surfaces of young leaves. For each swelling there is a corresponding pit or hollow on the underside of the leaf – this is where the nymph stage of the psylla will have fed. This problem normally occurs on citrus and related indigenous trees, such as ***Cussonia spicata*** (cabbage tree). Predatory wildlife, like ladybirds, wasps, lacewings and birds and spiders, can help to control the pysllid population. Control of ants by the gardener can also help.

Unless the infestation is severe, neither the fruit nor the general health of the affected tree should suffer. Organic insecticides that contain natural pyrethrins can be used to combat severe infestations, but they will unfortunately also kill most of the psylla's natural enemies (as would any non-organic insecticide).

Red spider mite



Summer sees a proliferation of red spider mites on a host of different crops and ornamentals in the garden. They breed and spread rapidly, are difficult to detect, and require perseverance and persistence to control them once they have established themselves. Look out for telltale signs of infestation – discolouration of the upper leaf surface, lack of new growth, and plants looking dull and lacklustre.



An easy way to test for red spider and other mites is to place a sheet of plain white paper on a clipboard. Hold this in place below the foliage of a plant and shake the leaves vigorously. Tiny specks of dust and other debris appear on the paper. Study these carefully with the naked eye, or better still, with a magnifying glass. If you can see the tiny specks walking around then the plant is infested with mites. They need to be controlled as they suck the sap from the leaves, causing plants to lose condition rapidly.



Spray the underside of the leaves with a suitable miticide. More than a single application is usually needed to control the pests.

www.makhro.co.za

Lily borer

These are caterpillars (moth larvae) that eat the base of the leaves and bore into the stem, causing the plants to go mushy and collapse. Treat the problem at first detection with a registered insecticide (cypermethrin is registered for this) or resort to a regular preventative application prior to infestation. Lily borer can be devastating and appears to be getting worse. Healthy, well-fed plants are less likely to be affected.

Always be on the look-out for early evidence of these devastating caterpillars that appear from spring to autumn in colder climates and can be active all year round in warmer regions. They are easily identified by their black and yellow striped bodies, growing to some 35 or 40mm in length. Usually found in the leaves or stems of host plants, the first signs of infestation are often detected by piles of gelatinous excreta amongst the foliage and stems. Plants that are attacked by this vicious pest include: agapanthus, amaryllis, clivia, crinum, cyrtanthus, haemanthus, narcissus, nerine, ornithogalum and scadoxus.



Powdery mildew



Powdery mildew is easy to identify and one of the oldest known fungal diseases known to man. The infection will cause a white to grey powdery fungal growth on leaves, stems and heads of plants. Interestingly, although the signs are similar on all types of plants, the disease is species specific, so an infection on your roses for example will not affect your grapes. The good news is that powdery mildew is rarely fatal for the plant, but can lead to leaves yellowing, curling and eventually turning brown and falling off the stems and flower buds can and also be affected, reducing the yields of vegetables and fruits.

The disease is more prevalent in high humidity and warm to moderate weather, with dry leaves and low light – so just about any time during the warmer seasons.

The need for early detection is paramount to controlling the problem. Commercial products on the market are often aimed at prevention before the problem occurs, or at least at the early signs. Use a fungicide specific to powdery mildew and use exactly as per the instructions.



www.ecobuz.co.za

Quick TIPS

Save seed from a tomato

If wanting to save the seed of a special tomato variety, squash the seeds onto a used paper serviette. Allow it to dry and place it in an old envelope. When the time comes to sow, you can simply lay the serviette onto the ground and cover it with soil. The serviette will break down in no time, but will help to create a moist surrounding during germination.



No herb garden? Start one now...

Of all the edibles, herbs are the easiest to grow and are always available. You don't have to worry about sowing seasons, pests or lack of water. They just like sun, some water now and then, and lots of picking. A herb garden can be as simple as five or six pots of your favourite herbs, or even one or two on your kitchen's windowsill.



If you already have a herb garden, try something new like this fruit salad plant (***Solanum muricatum***) for it fresh, slightly sweet fruit. They are available from Malanseuns – ask your local nursery to order it for you. www.malanseuns.co.za



Lawn edgings

One of the most important aspects of a lush, neat lawn is a well defined edge. This may be where the lawn adjoins the garden, driveway, paving or buildings. During the quieter late autumn and winter period try and improve the overall impression of your garden by brushing up the edges of your lawn. There are numerous different methods of achieving this important task:

- Neat and even curved edges are created by using strips of galvanised metal sheeting like **Perma Edge** buried in the ground. This ensures that the lawn grass cannot grow into the surrounding beds. Mechanical line trimmers can cut right against the metal protruding above the ground level – www.permaedge.co.za.



To keep your edges perfect, you can rely on tools like this trimmer from STIHL. www.stihl.co.za

- Face bricks, or pavers cemented in a straight, level line form a substantial edging and contrast attractively with the green lawn and grey and white plants in the flower bed. Make sure that the brick edge is buried sufficiently to prevent lawn mower blades from catching the edging.



Feed your lawn with a product specifically for lawns like Bio Ganic for Lawns. www.atlanticfertilisers.co.za

Tips for the perfect patch

- Check your mower for vibration. Vibration is normally caused by a blade that needs replacement and, if left unheeded, it can damage your mower.
- On petrol mowers it is recommended that you change the oil after every 50 hours of use, or once a year.
- Dispose of used engine oil in a responsible manner by handing it in at a lawnmower dealer or car workshop. Throwing it down the drain is bad for the environment.
- Grass and dust builds up underneath the mower. By cleaning this out your mower will collect grass better and it will be easier to push.
- On petrol mowers, if you clean the chassis or replace the blade, always tilt it backwards to prevent the oil from leaking onto the air filter. Also unplug the sparkplug lead to prevent the motor from starting accidentally. On electric motors always ensure that the power lead is unplugged.
- Your grass will be hungry after the long winter. Feed it with fertiliser high in nitrogen to give it a good start. Remember, nitrogen is the first number in the fertiliser formula. (For example, in 10:1:5, it is 10.)
- In spring, when rain is infrequent, it is important to water your lawn – 25mm of water per week is generally accepted as the norm.
- To prevent evaporation, water your lawn early in the morning.

www.oppasa.co.za



Perfect little peas

Try this: RAW seeds' 'Tom Thumb' is a miniature bush pea that's good for growing in containers or tucked into small spaces in the garden. It grows 20cm high, doesn't need staking, and the pods can be harvested when very young or left to mature for shelling. www.rawliving.co.za

Save by growing your own

The most cost-effective winter veggies to grow are Asian greens, lettuce, rocket and kale. Compare the cost of a packet of seed with a packet of harvested greens in the supermarket. For instance, one seed packet of lettuce (about R20) will provide five months' worth of the vegetable.

Why use palm peat?

Palm peat, also known a coir or coconut husk, is a potting medium that provides an alternative to potting soil featuring high water retention, suitable aeration and antifungal benefits.

Palm peat ensures good germination of seed and vigorous root, plant and flower development. Simply, add a brick of palm peat to a bucket and add water. www.starkeayres.co.za









Sprout it



If you want to jump-start your day then look no further than the humble seed or bean. When sprouted they provide a power-punch of fibre, protein, antioxidants and phytonutrients. You can eat them fresh from your sprouter, quickly cooked in your daily meals, or add them to your smoothie. A huge variety of seeds can be grown to eat. You can try chickpeas, mung beans, alfalfa (lucerne), fenugreek, sunflowers, lentils, soybeans and black beans for starters. I have found the quickest to sprout are lentils and mung beans.

Re-grow your veg

There are some veg that keep on giving. Veggies that you can regrow include fennel, lettuce, celery, spring onions, brocolli, rocket, beetroot and kale. Place a veggie scrap in shallow water, cut side down and leaf end up, and fresh greens will soon appear.



Propagate in water

Its fun to propagate plants in glass jars filled with water so you can see the roots developing. A collection of such bottles can also be a decor element in your home.



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