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MAY/JUNE 2020
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Preparing for fire season
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FRONT COVER

Recently baled and ready for winter... abundant bales are a blessing this year.

COMMENT, by Pete Bower — Time for good deeds



It feels like a lifetime has passed since our last printed edition, for time has indeed passed slowly in our state-enforced six week-to-two-month stay-at-home holiday. Yet, in that time an awful lot has happened, and we have all learnt a great deal about many things. We have learnt about this damned little virus and what it does, and does not, do. We have learnt about how stupid some politicians can be, and how brutal some can become when given a little bit of (quite possibly unconstitutional) authority. And, if we have been paying attention to the economy, we would have learnt how intertwined and complex a modern economy really is.

And, of course, we have learnt what two months of lockdown, with stupid and arbitrary bans on the sale of certain goods "for our own good", can do to destroy jobs, livelihoods ~ and even the economy itself.

When I wrote my comment for our interim e-edition published online in April it was clear that there was very little clarity about how, and when, the crisis caused by this virus would end.

Maybe now we have a slightly better idea. Simply, that it's not going to end any time soon. And it's not going to end well.

Having made those two points it is also worth saying that an awful lot of hot air is being generated by "pundits" giving their views, often alarmist, as to how awful the outcome is going to be, whether one is led by a Trump, a Johnson, a Bolsonaro or a Ramaphosa (or, some would add, by a Dlamini-Zuma...). Yes, sadly, the Press, in trying to report the news as best it can, has at times fuelled certain quarters to alarm, and even panic. Whatever...

Where does this leave us, the smallholders of Gauteng? And what can we do to help ourselves overcome our own financial miseries, and those around us whose misery may be even greater than our own?

It's pretty obvious, really, but sadly, not many of us are doing it: Grow vegetables for yourself and those less fortunate around you.

Smallholders of all sorts are, by definition, blessed with abundant ground yet our research (albeit carried out some years ago) showed that a surprisingly small number grew food, even part of their requirements, for their own consumption, let alone for sale (or for donation to a charity...).

Is this changing? We certainly hope so, and judging by the run on packets of vegetable seeds that many smallholder shops have experienced in recent weeks, it would seem that some smallholders at least spent some of their lockdown time planting veg gardens. Good for them.

A retail sized bag of, say, cabbage or carrot seed is hardly going to get one started in the commercial market gardening industry, but on a smallholding even such a modest amount will, if handled properly, provide more than enough for one's family, one's staff, and for those in one's own community who have fallen on hard times. For, look around your area. I'll bet you that behind the walls or fences of one or two plots there are families who have suddenly found themselves without a breadwinner, and who are bewildered and frightened. And quite possibly hungry.

Moreover, I have found that in most smallholding areas there are homes for the destitute, for the homeless, or for the physically- or mentally-disabled. Such institutions invariably survive on charities and donations, and charities and donors are in the same boat as the rest of us: they've run out of money.

So, if you want to do something to help in this crisis, something really practical, plant vegetables. And when they're ready, harvest them and clean them up a bit, then put them into old feed sacks and take a drive round your suburb to the homes and havens and simply dish the stuff out. You'll find grateful hands to take it from you, and it'll make you feel immensely good that you're able to do good towards your neighbours.

A (temporary) new look magazine

You will notice that this edition is printed on a thinner paper of a quality somewhat less refined than that on which we usually print. (It's actually newsprint).

That's because this stuff was all that was available to us, given the constraints on the number of machine minders our printers can have at work, the type of presses they use and the availability of paper on which they can print magazines.

Rest assured that when the situation normalises we will return to our more usual paper. For the moment, however, needs must. It was either this paper, or no magazine at all.



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Covid funding: TLU says Didiza lied

Agriculture minister Thoko Didiza got a solid slapdown from TLU president Louis Meintjies for her announcement that the Dept of Agriculture, Land Reform & Rural Development has distributed more than R500 million in relief funding to smallholders and commu-

nal farmers. Meintjies said, "The minister should be honest and admit that the department is merely supporting subsistence farmers who are predominantly ANC supporters. If the goal is to ensure food production for the country, her department should assist

commercial farmers ~ who are effectively responsible for South Africa's food security ~ as well." Meintjies called the move by the department a "voter-buying project" and suggested that, given the funding, more food should be available as a result of the grant, but says

this is not the case. In a statement, Didiza said that this funding was in an effort to ensure that agricultural production continues to ensure food security for the country. However, TLU disputes this claim, arguing that the contribution of this

Continued overleaf

MAILBAG

'Buy local to reboot the economy'

Sir ~ Thank you for the excellent editorial comment in the April 2020 issue. This is something that is so important but I doubt if those in power really understand the gravity of the situation.

How I wish this article can find itself on to the TV. Local industry needs to consider local content in whatever they sell to stem the

tide of unemployment and poverty. Just like the "go green"

movement we need a "go Made in South Africa" for this economy to reboot.

Bhekizwe Dlodlo
Vanderbijlpark

The Editor welcomes your letters, comments and opinions, but reserves the right to edit and shorten as necessary.

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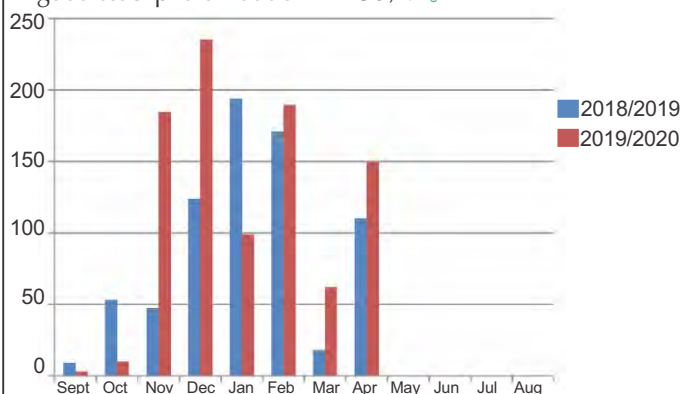
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NEWS

Good Gauteng rains, but dams still low

Although it got off to a late start, this year's rainy season in Gauteng turned out to be better than average. We recorded a total 932mm to the end of April, nearly 120mm more than last season, which itself was slightly better than average (see graph below, which begins in September at the beginning of the rains). The decent rains over Gauteng bode well for groundwater levels, which mean that boreholes, to some extent, will be replenished, and for fodder and dryland crop farmers in the province, who experienced decent cuts and good harvests as a result. A good stockpile of fodder

in or close to Gauteng means that horse owners and those with livestock will have plenty of supply at reasonable, and hopefully stable, prices through the winter months. For Gauteng's municipal water users the fact that good rains have fallen over the province does not mean an end to water shortages as the bulk of Gauteng's supply comes from much further afield, including the highlands of Lesotho via the Katse Dam which is only 36% full, and the Eastern highlands of Mpumalanga, which form the main catchment area of the Vaal Dam, currently standing at just more than 50%. 🌱



GOVERNMENT

From previous page

that the contribution of this group of farmers to the national food basket is only 1.9%, according to StatsSA. The department says its voucher distribution, which began on 18 May, would reach 15 036 smallholders out of more than 50 000 applicants. It says support for

livestock production was the most requested category, followed by vegetables, poultry and fruit. The maximum voucher amount is R50 000, with grant amounts in line with the size of the operation of the smallholder. 🌱

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GROW for GOOD

How to grow veg in a frosty winter

If you choose to follow the exhortation given in our Comment on page 1 to grow vegetables to feed the less fortunate in your community, there is a limited range that you can now start with, as we head into winter. For, particularly in the colder areas of Gauteng, your enemy at this time of year, and over the next few months, is cold, short days and, particularly, frost at night. Nevertheless, there are things you can do to overcome at least some of the problems

Covid crisis: Hunger and poverty stalk the land. Here's how you can help your neighbours

you may face, and achieve something within a reasonable timeframe, regardless of the season. Normally when growing vegetables for home consumption we would suggest that you choose the varieties to grow according to the likes of your family members, and to plan very carefully the numbers of plants to ensure a

continuous supply, without an oversupply.

For this exercise, however, ie growing for the needy, neither of those points apply. You simply want (and need) to grow as much as you can, of whatever grows best and fastest. For you can be sure there will be hungry mouths aplenty, people who will weep with gratitude when

you hand your harvested produce on, whatever it might be.

In Gauteng at this time of year we are able to grow beetroot, brassicas such as cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli, broad beans, carrots, dwarf spinach, garlic, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, onions, parsnips, peas, potatoes, radishes, Swiss chard and turnips.

Choose the cultivar that suits the climate in your area.

The site you choose for your food garden will contribute greatly to its success. The amount of sunshine it receives, the soil type and other factors need to be factored in. However, for the purposes of feeding the needy let's assume that you already have a vegetable patch established.

So, when deciding where to set your garden, you would already have thought about the vegetables you want to grow, and their light and sunshine requirements:

☐ Vegetables such as beetroot, beans, leeks, cabbage, peas and onions require a full day of sunlight.

☐ Root vegetables, such as carrots, can cope with half a day of sun.

☐ Leafy vegetables, such as lettuce and spinach, grow in the shade.

Continued overleaf





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GROW for GOOD

From previous page

Given that even the daytime weather is colder in winter, seeds germinate more slowly, and seedlings come on more slowly, too, than they would in warmer weather.

And, of course, frost is a problem that will decimate many species (eg beans, peppers, brinjals, sweet potato) at night.

Here is a trick to bring seeds on faster for those species that are seeded directly in the ground (eg beetroot, spinach, chard, carrots, etc).

Into your well-prepared bed, sow the seed as you would normally, cover with the requisite layer of fine soil and

water down well. Really well. Now cover the bed with a plastic sheet, held down at the edges by the occasional brick. Old greenhouse plastic is ideal for the purpose, but, given that seeds don't need light to germinate, only moisture and warmth, you can even use black plastic, with the proviso that you need to lift this off the moment the seeds start to emerge (you can leave see-through plastic on for a day or so longer to ensure that all the seeds in the bed have germinated).

Covering your seed beds in this way will not only ensure that the soil is warmed by the sun during the day, but it will also reduce your watering requirement at this early

stage, because the plastic will trap the moisture which rises from the soil and return it in the night as it condenses. The plastic will also retain a bit of heat in the soil well into the evening.

This may sound like a maplotter improvisation, but it's by no means a new idea. In the northern hemisphere gardeners use "cold frames"

which are slanted south-facing glass or perspex "windows" built over brick (usually) chambers into which the seeds are sown. The hinged glass can be raised on very hot days to prevent scorching, but it does a grand job of trapping heat to aid in germination and growth. If your species is usually grown from seedlings and you start your own, place your seed trays indoors, on a north-facing windowsill, to

Continued overleaf



Scrap greenhouse plastic to aid germination

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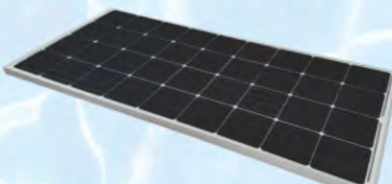
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From previous page

north-facing windowsill, to achieve the same advantage. With your young plants now ready, there's another trick you can use to speed growth in their early stages. For individually spaced seedlings such as the brassicas, you can fashion scrap offcuts of greenhouse plastic into simple teepees, which are placed around and over the seedlings and secured with a length of

sturdy wire or a tin stick (wire works best). See the accompanying illustration for simple dimensions of a useful tepee. These are left in place over the seedling until it starts to emerge from the top. For plants such as carrots and beetroot which are sown en-masse in rows you can cover the bed, or at least parts of the bed, with a cloche made of old plastic and wire. This is placed over the plants to protect them from cold, but can be lifted off to facilitate watering, and weeding etc.

Of course, further protection from cold and frost can be achieved by using impenetrable material such as old corrugated iron or greenhouse plastic on the southern side, as well as the eastern and western sides of your growing area, and covering the whole area with 80% (black) shadecloth.

Soil does not contain a limitless supply of nutrients for all plants. It must be cared for and allowed to recover from planting. The best way to do this, and ensure a healthy crop, is crop rotation, where you plant different

Continued overleaf



Scrap plastic teepee to cover seedlings comprises a piece of cut plastic and a length of bent wire. Trowel for scale.

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GROW for GOOD

From previous page

vegetables at different times of year, as each plant uses different nutrients.

Crop rotation may also reduce pest problems, weed infestation and diseases in the soil.

Crop rotation is one of the most basic principles of vegetable production and should always be practised. It means that you do not plant the same kind of vegetable in the same bed for three or four seasons.

While crop rotation is recommended for improving soils and for conservation

There is a wealth of information on companion planting, and crop rotation, on our website. Go to www.sasmallholder.co.za

purposes, its greatest benefit lies in the reduction of disease levels in the soil. Many pathogens can persist in the soil after the crop has been removed (such as black-rot in cabbage).

Companion planting also has value to protect plants from pests. It is based on the theory that the companion plants ~ for example, flowers growing next to a food crop ~ disrupt the search pattern of pests looking for host plants.

They detect the host plants but become confused because of the more diverse planting style.

The Gauteng Smallholder has published a number of articles on companion planting and crop rotation. For more on these topics check the website

www.sasmallholder.co.za. You will find a list in the Useful Documents section.

A further protection for your plants from cold soil is the use of mulch. Mulch is a layer of materials used to cover soil so that you reduce evaporation, keep soil moist, moderate soil temperature (warm in winter, cool in summer), reduce weeds and soil erosion. Mulch can help to fertilise your soil.

Organic mulch can be made from bark, dead leaves, straw,

compost, nut shells, stones, bark chips, pebbles, etc. Simply spread a thin layer of mulch over your vegetable patch, taking care to avoid covering plants and their stems, to gain the benefits.

Gauteng winters are cruelly dry, so be sure to water at least twice a week, or more depending on the vegetable and your soil. Ensure deep watering - the water should reach 30cm into the soil. Water in the warmth of the morning. Where there is risk of frost do not water in the afternoon or evening. 🌱




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For the purposes of growing food fast for the needy in your area you will want the best seed for the purpose, and this will probably be the modern, purpose-bred commercial hybrids.

These have been selected and bred by master seedsmen to produce uniform fruits, bulbs or leaves in the fastest possible time, with a certain resistance to disease and pest, and, often, hardiness against excesses of heat or cold.

But, while they are ideal for



A Brandywine Pink tomato.

the commercial grower, or for somebody looking to feed the needy during the course of the current economic crisis, they also often lack many of the subtle flavours and textures of the more traditional varieties that you may remember your mother cooking up in your childhood. For these flavours, and thus for the family vegetable garden, you need to go for heirloom seeds.

These are the kind of seeds produced and sold by specialist seedsmen such as Livingseeds: The good old-fashioned varieties that have stood the test of time, open pollinated, heirloom and most definitely GMO free.

Livingseeds.co.za is a leading South African heirloom seed company, claiming to be the first heirloom seed company in South Africa and pioneer-

ing the heirloom seed industry.

Livingseeds grows out hundreds of rare and unusual seed varieties every year on its farm south of Johannesburg. The company employs dedicated inhouse growers, whose job is to ensure that the best seed is grown, selected, and saved from generation to generation.

While heirloom varieties often grow a bit slower, and less tidily and uniformly, than the modern hybrids, they come in a wide array of colours, shapes and sizes, often with intense widely varied flavours and textures. Black carrots? White brinjals? Purple beans? Multicoloured maize? All heirlooms.

Another advantage of heirloom varieties is that they make their own viable seed



Chiogga or candy stripe beetroots.

which, if you leave one or two plants to mature fully, or to flower and dry off at the end of the season, you can harvest your own seed, clean it and dry it, and use it next season.

Livingseeds has a comprehensive website on which you can order batches of seed in packets, with instructions, as well as bulk packs for microgreens, and the company will courier your order to your door. Go to www.livingseeds.co.za or call 073 141 7101. 🌱



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Give a gift that keeps on giving...

With the gloom and doom of the Covid-19 pandemic weighing heavily upon us all, here's something to brighten up your day ~ and bring a little lightness to myour friends and business

associates as well. It's an initiative to create jobs and opportunities in South Africa in the wake of the pandemic. The Sustainable Season Project was created by Growing Paper, in partnership with the World

Wildlife Fund and local artist Anja Stoeckigt. The project entails impregnating handmade paper with flower, vegetable and herbs seeds (your choice) and then printing on the paper to form a range of common printed

products such as greeting cards, wedding invitations etc. Once used, the recipient simply "plants" the card, or bits of it, either in containers or the garden, and is rewarded with a colourful

Continued overleaf

E-EDITION

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TREAT YOUR WATER TO A SCARAB SYSTEM

GIFTS

From previous page display of flowers, or a useful collection of herbs or vegetables, as a result. Available are packs of five greeting cards, A4 frameable



Examples of bookmarks, greeting cards and gift tags.

prints and single greeting cards. The WWF Sustainable Agriculture Project encourages a strong commitment to conserve the natural environment by farming in a way that is profitable for business, society and nature.

Growing Paper, a Western Cape-based company has been producing a wide variety of quality handmade seeded products for ten years. The company provides permanent

employment for more than 30 individuals.

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Growing Paper collects used paper from schools, banks and local businesses and processes it into pulp by adding only water. To this pulp papermakers add



A monthly calendar ~ each month a different plant.

seed and produce handmade sheets, which are dried in a tunnel.

Since the papermaking process uses large amounts of water, the papermakers reuse the wastewater for farming activities on the farm where the factory is located. The products are printed with water-based ink.

Furthermore, the products are made in such a way that any part of the product which isn't plantable is either biodegradable or recyclable. There are four mixes of seeds in the paper:

- ☐ Mixed flowers: alyssum and poppy;
- ☐ Indigenous flowers: buck bay vygie and African daisy;
- ☐ Herbs: basil and wild rocket;
- ☐ Vegetables: carrots and tomatoes.

The calendars have a different seed per month, including rocket, basil, tomato, carrots, chamomile, lemon-balm, lavender, forget-me-not, lettuce, African daisy, thyme and parsley.

The company also makes seed-embedded wedding stationery and confetti, funeral mementos, gift tags, bookmarks, business cards, coasters, postcards, flyers and corporate gifts.

Go to <https://shop.-growingpaper.co.za/>. The products are available at a few stores in Gauteng. Contact Nileta on 071 472 4376. 🌱



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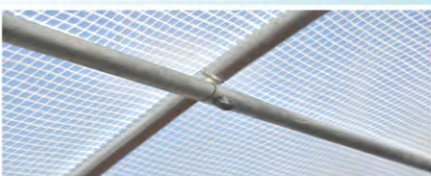


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Buying the best fodder for your livestock

As a livestock owner who needs to buy fodder for your animals in the winter, what do you look for to ensure the best quality for your money, and fodder that is fresh and dry, free of debris such as twigs, leaves and stones, dust, rubbish, and weeds?

And if second-grade fodder is all that is available to you, or is all that you can afford, what can you do to ensure that it is palatable and safe for your animals?

At first glance bales can be deceptive, and it is not the exterior of a bale that should interest you, but what's inside. The best way to judge what is in a bale is to plunge your hand as deep into it as possible and yank out a small handful.

If, as you pull it out your handful gives off a cloud of

The type of grass, how it is baled and how it is stored will all impact the quality of bales. Know what to look for.

white, grey or black dust, chances are the contents are mouldy and will make your livestock ill, because the white, grey or dark cloud contains mould spores. These bales should be rejected.

If the dust that flies out is red or orange, the grass is dusty, and this can, to an extent and with a bit of effort, be dealt with.

If you pull out a handful of weed instead of grass, try again elsewhere in the same bale, or move on to another one. One

or two weeds in an average bale are inevitable and in most cases the animals will eat around them. Too many, however, and you're simply

wasting money because your animals will be rejecting a lot of what you have paid for. There is also the danger, of course, that your animals could ingest a weed that is dangerous or potentially fatal, so bales containing weeds

Continued overleaf



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From previous page should, if possible be rejected.

Bales containing debris such as twigs, stones and rubbish should also, if possible, be rejected because of the wastage and danger that an animal may inadvertently swallow something detrimental.

With the older-style small square bales, and with bales from mini-round balers, the hand-plunging test works well. It is less accurate on the jumbo bales and large round bales.

It is also important to know how the bale was stored before you came to look at it. The best storage, without doubt, is off the ground (eg on pallets) in a barn. Next best, because of the danger of sweating, is under a tarpaulin. Lastly, bales stored outside, or exposed to the sun will be the worst of the lot, at least on their outer sides. This is particularly true of lucerne, which becomes brown and overly brittle very quickly when exposed to sunlight. There is a simple solution to rendering dusty (but not mouldy) hay palatable to livestock, and that is to wash it clean before feeding it. This is best achieved by breaking the bale open, and plunging the grass into a bath, or half-drum, of water, swilling it about, and shaking it out of excess water before stuffing it into your haynets and feeding it

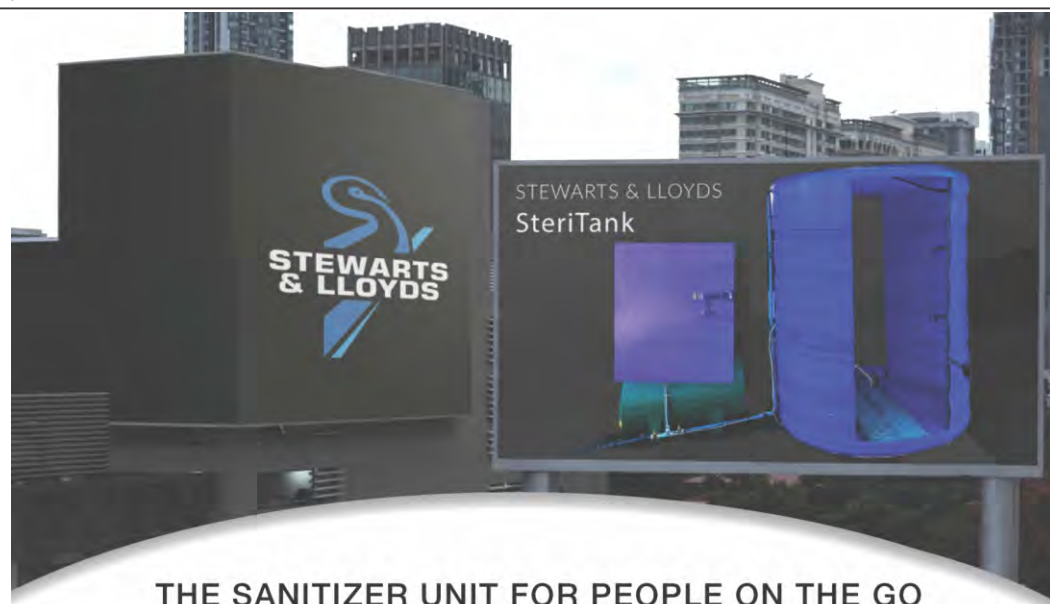
immediately. Don't let it stand around for more than a few hours or it will start to go mouldy.



Mixing lucerne with b-grade fodder to make it more palatable.

And if you dilute a good dollop of liquid molasses into your wash water you will render even the driest fodder very palatable to most animals. Throw the

wash water out every couple of days, however, because it will be full of fine mud at the bottom, and the molasses mixture, if you use it, will begin to ferment. The disadvantage of the molasses method is that your wash bath and surrounds will attract flies. By the thousand... You can also make poor fodder more palatable by mixing in a few handfuls of lucerne before feeding. 🌱



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AUCTIONS

Online auction sets record-price for bull

It seems trite and obvious to say it, but the cellular telephone, the internet and the personal computer really have revolutionised the way modern humans live ~ and do business. The recent restrictions placed on the movement of people and calls for social distancing have only highlighted how deeply these modern technologies have become entrenched in

modern life.

In stark illustration of this trend, the recent record price that was achieved for an Nguni bull has drawn attention to the fact that online auctions are meeting the needs of breeders, livestock buyers, auction houses and farmers' livestock agents.

The concept of online livestock auctions is not new ~ these services have been available for more than a year in South Africa. Some of the digital services have been established by groups of farmers in a bid to meet the needs of both buyers and sellers in terms of profitability, market access, fair price discovery and efficient transfer of ownership. It makes sense to use available technology to create electronic trading platforms.



The record-setting Nguni bull.

It is believed apparently the auction in which the Nandi Nguni bull was sold for R310 000 was held on WhatsApp.

Online auctions proved useful when foot and mouth disease put a stop to live auctions last year and into the early months of this year.

Buyers and sellers cannot necessarily maintain networks of contacts throughout the

country to buy or sell animals when they need to, and the auction houses make this possible.

Online auctions, such as was held over WhatsApp, operate in much the same way as a physical auction and buyers and sellers need to register with the auctioneer beforehand to be allowed to participate, as they would at a physical auction. 🌿

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MACHINERY

To stop vibration balance your blades

What's the fastest way to destroy any piece of machinery that rotates at very high speed? Vibration.

There are two causes of vibration. The first is particularly noticeable in machines with less sophisticated engines ~ the vibration caused by the engine itself.

The second cause, and the one that concerns us when using rotating machinery such as described above, is the vibration around the rotating shaft caused by unbalanced blades.

Simply, the vibration is caused by the difference in weight between the heavier side (or blade), and the lighter side, or blade, as it spins around the shaft. The vibration is the manifestation of the greater outward force developed by the heavier side or blade, as it spins around the shaft.

In very bad cases vibration can cause the machine to shake itself to pieces which, apart from the loss of bolts, nuts, cracked welds etc, can result in bits flying off at lethally high speeds.

Even if the vibration doesn't cause the machine to shake

itself to pieces, the increased wear on the shaft and its bearings will need expensive and premature repair.

Thus, in any maintenance one does on blades and spinning parts on a rotating machine it is vital to ensure that everything weighs exactly the same.

With two separate blades, such as are attached to some mowers and slashers, this is simple. One can weigh the individual blades on a kitchen or bathroom scale, and dress the heavier blade until it matches the lighter one.

With a single blade which fastens to the cutting deck on the shaft, hang the blade by its middle hole on a piece of horizontally held metal, such as a thick nail or heavy gauge wire. If the blade is unbalanced by even a small amount the heavier side will dip downwards. Dress it lightly with a file or on a

grinder and repeat the hanging process, and do this repeatedly until the blade hangs level.

What causes blades to become unbalanced? In most cases wear on the cutting surfaces will be even.

However, when one blade strikes a rock there is a chance that a chip may be broken off the blade, causing it to lose weight.

In severe cases, a blade may lose a whole chunk from its outer edge, leading it to be unbalanced.

In such a case, rather discard both blades and replace them.

Vibration, even in well-balanced blade sets, will occur, to the extent that it can loosen nuts and bolts.

That is why it is good practice to go round one's slasher or mower, or chipper, with a spanner before working. 🌿

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Veld fires: all you need to know & do

As the rains end, smallholders must turn their attention to the impending fire season. Rural landowners and tenants are obligated by law to protect their land and neighbours' land from the risk of fire. Under the National Veld & Forest Fires Act of 1998, whether in the course of burning a firebreak or simply in the case of a runaway veld fire, if you don't take sufficient precautions, or neglect to help in the case of an emergency, you could be charged and face penalties which could include compensating your neighbour for loss of buildings, livestock and income. Also, importantly, the provisions of the act will have a direct bearing on how your insurer views any claim you may lodge following a fire and assessors are quick to point

The law, the theory and the practical aspects of veld fire prevention and combatting, as well as tips on how to train your fire crew

out that there are certain aspects of the law which are so vague as to make it relatively easy for an underwriter to wriggle out of paying a claim.

How fire burns

Fire management on smallholdings is multi-faceted. First, it is important people understand how fire burns. Simply put, fire is the result of raising the temperature of a substance sufficiently in the presence of a flammable gas. The lower the temperature at which it will ignite, the more flammable the substance. Thus, the most common mistake untrained people

make when fighting a grass fire is to aim their jet of water at the flames rather than at the base of the fire.

Why? Although the smoke, flames and heat are the scary part of a fire they are in fact merely the aftermath of the event of combustion taking place at their base. And the smaller a flammable item is, ie, the less of it one needs to heat, the easier it will ignite. (That's why one uses kindling (ie, small twigs) to start a braai fire. The small twigs can be heated up to a temperature sufficient to cause them to burn easier and quicker than a large piece of wood.)

Conversely, lowering the temperature of the combustible material by cooling it with water or a jet of air, (or starving it of flammable gases) will prevent it from bursting into flames.

In practical terms in a veld fire this means cooling the combustible material by wetting it as or before it gets hot enough to burst into flames. Hence the need to spray down at the base, rather than up into the dancing orange flames.

Fire season preparation

To prevent veld fires, smallholders must prepare. This includes cutting the grass in paddocks and on roadside verges if the local authority does not attend to it, clearing undergrowth and leaves etc under trees, near beehives

Continued on next page

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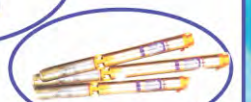
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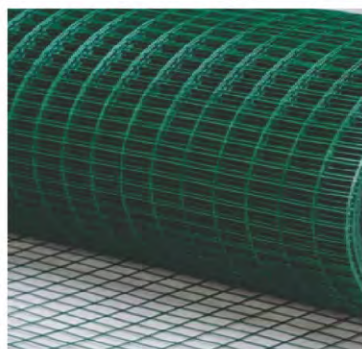
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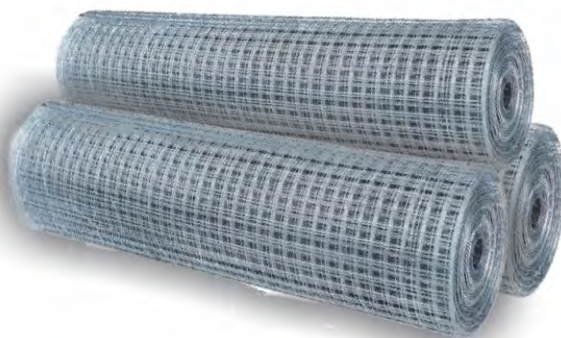
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From previous page

and around other infrastructure such as fences, pumps and piping, woodpiles, reservoirs, outbuildings, etc. The idea behind cutting and clearing away the dried cuttings is to remove as much combustible material as possible. If you're lucky, and the grass in your paddocks is reasonably clear of weeds, you can bale the resulting hay and make a bit of money selling it as fodder.

While you don't own the roadside land adjacent to your property, and while it should be the responsibility of your local authority to clear it, many don't.

Many fires that start due to carelessness or wilfulness, start on the roadside verges, and spread from there. Thus, cutting and clearing your stretch of verge will help keep any fire that starts there small and easily extinguished before it spreads to your property.

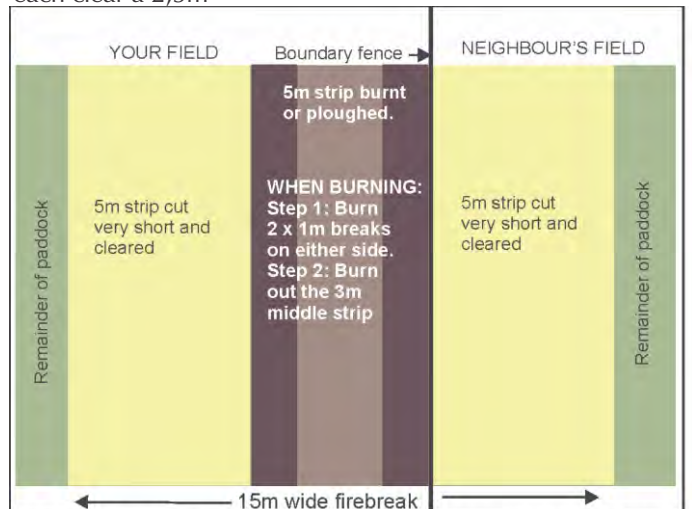
Fire prevention also includes the making of firebreaks. The law requires a land occupier (not necessarily the owner, but tenants also) to make firebreaks around his property to prevent the spread of fire between his property and neighbouring land.

What constitutes a firebreak depends on a number of factors, not the least important being the height of the grass adjoining it, but a general rule is that a firebreak in Gauteng grassland should under normal circumstances comprise two 5m wide strips of veld mown short to manicured lawn length and cleared of the cuttings, separated by a 5m wide strip in which all the combustible material has been removed. The full 15m width can be shared between neighbours, ie, he can cut the one 5m strip alongside the boundary fence while you plough or

burn 5m immediately the other side of the fence and cut the second 5m strip on your property, or you can each clear a 2,5m

strip on each side of the fence, and each cut 5m alongside it. See the diagram below.

Continued on next page



How to make a 15m firebreak on a smallholding: share it with your neighbour

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FIRE SEASON

From previous page

Removal of the combustible material in this strip can be done mechanically, ie, by ploughing and raking or scraping, or by burning.

The advantage of a ploughed and raked firebreak is that there is no danger of fire breaking out while the break is being made, and you don't need to inform your neighbour when making your break. The disadvantages of a ploughed break are the fact

that you need a tractor and implements, and the cost (fuel for the tractor) and time (labour) to make the break. Another disadvantage is the weed-like vegetation that will spring up in the disturbed soil of the break in the spring. The advantage of a burnt break is the speed with which the job can be done, the simplicity of the equipment required (eg, fire beaters, backpack sprayers, hoses/pipes

or motorised sprayers or blowers and labour).

The disadvantages of a burnt break are the fact that you need to choose the right day and time (a windless day, preferably late in the afternoon), and you must discuss with your neighbours to agree on a mutually-suitable date for the job (so that the neighbours can participate on the same day) and the danger of the burning

turning into a runaway fire if not properly controlled.

Apart from breaks around the perimeter of your property it is also advisable to have them between individual camps within your property.

If you are using a slasher or plough to build fire breaks, pay careful attention to the small section between the edge of your implement and your fence. Your implement will likely not be able to cut right up to the fence and you will therefore need to clear those few centimetres of grass by hand, using a hand-slasher or brushcutter. This will also help prevent the flames from licking up against your fence in the case of a fire. It is good practice to use a shovel to overturn the ground directly under a fence to create an extra mini firebreak. This is because, in the unfortunate event of a fire without these extra precautions,

Continued on next page

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From previous page
the galvanising on your fence will likely burn away, leaving the metal exposed to corrosion. If your fence is electrified, the flames will also melt the plastic isolators. A similar approach must be taken on pumps, plastic pipes, etc. If you have a concrete slab wall ("stop-nonsense") along your boundary, don't be lulled into a false sense of safety, particularly if there are honeycomb slabs at intervals along the bottom to allow for drainage. The areas around these slabs should be cleared of all grass, to prevent fire from creeping through the holes.

Fire equipment

Along with firebreaks, the law partially dictates what firefighting equipment you

should have on hand to fight fires.

Owners of threatened land must have "equipment, protective clothing and trained personnel" as are prescribed or, in the absence of prescribed requirements, reasonably required in the circumstances. The act is not specific on what equipment or training may be deemed reasonably required. This section of the act places an onus on landowners to train their staff as fire fighters. Owners must also ensure that in their absence "responsible persons" are present on or near their land to assist in fighting fires.

When things go wrong

The landowner must also take "all reasonable steps" to alert owners of adjoining land (and the fire protection association, if one exists) of the presence of a fire.

The act places an obligation on landowners to fight fires, and gives them wide powers of entry to do so. Specifically, "any owner who has reason to believe that



Runaway veld fire.

a fire on his or her land or the land of an adjoining owner may endanger life, property or the environment must immediately ... do everything in his or her power to stop the spread of the fire."

He may enter any land endangered by the fire. Fire protection officers, acting under the auspices of a fire protection association may issue orders and take control of personnel fighting the fire, and, indeed, "order any person who is apparently not younger than 16 years and not older than 60 years to assist..."

However, anybody acting according to the law to prevent the spread of a fire, may enter any land, destroy trees, grass, crops, and other vegetation, enter or break and enter any premises, prevent any person from entering any premises, forcibly remove any person in danger or who obstructs efforts to fight the fire.

Breaking the law

There are three categories of offence:

- ☐ Category one: Any person who lights a fire in an area where the minister has

Continued on next page



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FIRE SEASON

From previous page

officially prohibited fires; those guilty face a fine and imprisonment of up to two years for a first conviction.

Any owner, occupier or person in control of land on which a fire occurs who fails to take reasonable steps to extinguish the fire or to prevent it from damaging property on adjoining land;

☐ Category two: Any person who leaves a fire unattended, lights a fire which spreads, throws out matches or other material subject to spontaneous combustion, or lights a fire on a road verge or smokes in an area where it is prohibited.

Failure to burn firebreaks, failure to inform neighbours of the intention to burn firebreaks, failure to meet the standards of readiness to fight fires as described above, refusal to assist a fire protection officer when ordered.

☐ Category three: Anybody

Grass firefighting equipment needs will vary from plot to plot, depending on its size, terrain, vegetation and manpower

who prevents a fire protection officer, a forest officer, policeman or fireman from carrying out his duties.

What you'll need

If you have ever stood near the face of a runaway fire you will have noticed the quite considerable "wind" that the flames whip up. That is the convection currents created by the rising heat.

Any fire fighting efforts you



Using a Stihl blower to fight fire.

take need therefore to also overcome the energy of the winds. That requires a lot of power; certainly more than a team of labourers armed with no more than a firebeater each, or a backpack sprayer. Stronger, higher capacity sprayers are required, and these inevitably come mounted on trailers or on bakkies, with their own water supply. Or, you can use the new, powerful motorised backpack blowers now available from leading manufacturers such as Husqvarna, Maruyama, Shindaiwa and Stihl, so long as the user is also properly kitted out in a fireproof suit, breather apparatus and goggles.

Make water wetter

Concerns over water capacity

can be partially overcome by making one's firefighting water "wetter".

This is achieved by adding compounds one can buy from any good garden centre, namely urea and wetting agent, to the water (or by adding a specially bought compound from a firefighting equipment dealer such as Multifire & Power in Springs). This must be added immediately before fighting the fire and cannot be stored in the unit as it will perish hoses and washers. ☀

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FIRE SEASON

Choosing your firefighting equipment

Even the best fire-prevention techniques are no match for a runaway fire on a windy winter's day and even with firebreaks in place, you need to ensure you have adequate equipment to combat a blaze on your land.

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The equipment necessary to control a small fire is not necessarily the same as is required to control a runaway veld fire

If you find yourself in the unfortunate position of having to fight a fire, water is the best possible thing you can have with which to fight it. Trouble is, water is not readily portable, and when it is, it's heavy.

So unless your fire danger is such, or your pocket is deep enough, that you opt for your own fire engine, or bakkie or trailer-mounted fire fighting sprayer, chances are your fire fighting arsenal will include equipment other than water sprayers.

For, from a hastily hacked off wattle branch to a custom-designed four-wheel-drive fire engine, the range of equipment available for fighting grass fires is vast. And luckily there's something suitable for every situation and budget. It may not be practical on large plots but on many smaller smallholdings it may be possible to fight fires using hosepipes attached to the taps which form part of the plot's irrigation system. If you wish to use hoses to fight fires you must remember

the following:

- ☐ The hoses should be of sufficient length to reach all corners of the plot.
- ☐ They should be available at all times and be fitted with suitable spray nozzles. You will be amazed at how much pressure is lost through a hole in the hose or a leaky coupling.
- ☐ The taps and hose couplings should all be compatible. This may also seem obvious but the realization that the tap in your field is not fitted with a Gardena-type click-on fitting compatible with what's on your hose should not be

Continued on next page

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FIRE SEASON

From previous page
made while a wall of fire advances towards you.

☐ Ensure that whatever system is used to pump the water in the network is powerful enough to achieve a decent pressure at the end of the hose. Holding a hose that is dribbling water at a rate no faster than an old man with a prostate problem can piddle is hardly likely to make one an effective firefighter. If hoses are impractical one must resort to transportable water. On a small plot the cheapest source of transportable water comes in the form of a 16 litre hand-operated backpack sprayer. If you have these for spraying fruit trees they can form part of your winter firefighting arsenal if kept filled with water and readily available. Ensure before the season starts, that the spray nozzle fitted delivers a concentrated jet of water rather than the delicate mist-like spray with which one

would coat the leaves of a fruit tree with insecticide. Also ensure that the pump is working. A sprayer stored filled with water (or, worse, residual insecticide spray) can seize up and be useless in a crisis.

While the fruit tree-type sprayers make adequate fire fighters for cut grass in no-wind situations, their relatively short spraying distances make them inadequate for serious firefighting.

A bit more powerful, but still unmotorised are the specialist backpack firefighting units, with two-handed spray lances that one operates like a bicycle pump and which deliver water at a greater volume over a much larger distance.

If you feel daunted by the prospect of carrying 16 litres of water on your back, or need something with a bigger capacity, new to the market is the Pretoria-produced

Waterbok (right), a cart on wheels, drawn by the user by a strap around his waist, with a hand-operated spray lance.

The Waterbok comes in 40 and 65 litres. Its boat-shaped design is easy to pull through rough terrain and narrow spaces, while its compact size makes it easy to reach flames through fences, without having to cut the fence to allow large equipment through. The tank is easily filled through a large lid on top ~ users can simply push the cart into a dam or river and let it fill up by itself. Out of fire season, the Waterbok can be used to spray crops or livestock.

Moving up to motorized sprayers, the smallest



The Waterbok is attached to the user's waist.

available is also the backpack type, the drawback being that it has a smaller water carrying capacity than a hand-pump type, because of the weight and volume of the motor. Also in the portable category is a two-man pump unit available from many small machinery suppliers in Gauteng. Comprising hoses, a high-pressure pump and motor mounted on a metal stretcher-like frame it is easily carried and has an intake pipe which can be fed from a dam, reservoir, stream or drum of water.

Continued on next page

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FIRE SEASON

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Multifire & Power of Springs manufacture small water trolleys. These hand-pushed wheeled units are fitted with 110 to 200 litre tanks and small spray units and are commonly used as high-pressure washers, or gutter cleaners, etc. But, having their own built-in water supply tank they can be used as firefighters. Also popular, of course, are the single axle trailer-mounted firefighting units which have their own water tanks, or integral tank/pump/motor combinations that can be mounted on the back of a bakkie. Typically, the trailer firefighters and bakkie-mounted units will have a PVC tank with a large filler hole, a pull-start engine and a high-pressure pump with one or two hoses on reels. The trailer units can be filled and left in readiness throughout the fire season. They are, however, more expensive than the equivalent capacity bakkie-mounted set-up. The disadvantage to the



A motorised backpack blower, aimed at the base of the flame.

bakkie-mounted type is that it effectively renders one's bakkie a mini-tanker for the winter unless one can lift it on and off quickly. When considering any kind of motorized firefighter an important point is to see how quickly the tank can be filled, and how. Can the high-pressure output pump double up as a suction filler pump? How far will the hose reach and how long will it take to refill the tank? Jet air streams can also prove effective in fighting fire ~ if used correctly. Motorised backpack blowers are available specifically for firefighting. For example, Husqvarna's 380BTS is a large commercial-grade blower that delivers the equivalent of a 200 mile-per-hour gale ~ quite enough to blow flames away. Weighing only 13,2kg the unit has the advantage of a limitless supply of air, whereas a water sprayer needs filling every few minutes. Similar specialist blowers are available from other manufacturers, including Stihl,

Maruyama and Shindaiwa. A common garden leaf blower is not sufficiently powerful to fight grass fires. If all of these options are too elaborate or expensive you can resort to the manual methods: firebeaters, wet sacks or wattle branches.

Firebeaters made from a pole attached to flat pieces of rubber conveyor belt are more effective and easier to use than flapping at the fire with a sack dipped in water and are an improvement on the rural improvisation of a branch broken off a wattle sapling. But in truth these manual devices are not suitable for tackling fires that have run away, those in long grass, or those being driven by wind.

Hoses and connections should be regularly checked for leaks, while engines and pumps should be periodically started and tested. Spare fuel

should be kept at the ready (but out of harm's way) and motorized equipment should be serviced at the end of the fire season in exactly the same way that one services one's lawnmowers at the end of summer. Fuel should be drained from the tanks and the cylinders and fuel tanks lightly coated with oil to prevent deterioration. Finally, any equipment that is lost or broken during a fire should be replaced as soon as possible afterwards, to ensure one is always ready for the next blaze ~ whether on one's own land or one's neighbour's. 🌿

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FIRE SEASON

Fire equipment: Train everyone NOW!

Assuming you have the necessary equipment in place here are some tips to managing fires on one's land.

Firstly, manpower: If one has the luxury of paid manpower the most important aspect is to ensure that it is trained in the deployment and use of the equipment.

Even if you have only family members and maybe one or two workers to rely on, it is worth showing them how

Don't wait until your field is blazing to show workers and family how to use a beater or start a sprayer

each item of equipment is used, in a calm atmosphere, before the fire season starts. One can even assign certain roles to individual members of the team.

And the training should include not only the how-to stuff pertaining to the equipment, but an awareness

of the importance of firefighting in the first place. This is important because many Gautengers are blissfully unaware of the danger of fire and are quite happy to let verges and fields burn away untended, not realizing the danger to surrounding areas,

equipment etc.

Staff should therefore be taught to look out for the haze and smell of smoke and when seen, identify immediately from whence it comes. In certain critical cases a system of panic buttons and alarms might be a good idea to ensure the quickest possible response to the start of a blaze. This presupposes there is not already a fire protection association (FPA) in your area which will make such an approach mandatory. Communication with the people at the fire face is vital to ensure a concentrated attack on the blaze rather than a hit-and-miss every-man-for-himself approach. Safety of the people is also important and a trained firefighter will always keep one eye open for the man next to him, and on the overall progress of the blaze. Smoke inhalation is the biggest danger for fighters of a grass fire, with dizziness and unconsciousness being the

Continued on next page



Fighting veld fires requires teamwork.

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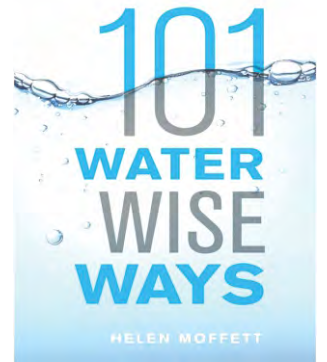
Books to help you change your ways

Cape Town author Helen Moffett has written two very useful, practical books to help us in the battle against water scarcity and the problem of waste. They are both published by Bookstorm. *101 Water Wise Ways* was written in response to Cape Town's Day Zero crisis. She started blogging on saving water and was inundated with

further suggestions from literally hundreds of people. She highlights how individuals need to face the reality that South Africa is water scarce and we have to start treating water as the precious and limited resource that it is. The book looks at water-proofing your home and garden ~ smallholders will be intrigued by her green urinal. There are practical tips for

bathrooms and personal hygiene, laundry and dish washing and cooking. There is advice for businesses, institutions and employers. The book emphasises that we need to become caring and conscious members of our communities, as we are all in this together. The recommended selling

Continued on next page



TRAINING

From previous page

result, and firefighters should always be aware of the possible need to pull their co-workers to safety should they be overcome by smoke. Indeed, the efficiency and comfort of workers fighting a fire is greatly enhanced if their eyes are not stung by smoke or their breathing impaired and among the purchases one can make for one's firefighting arsenal are gloves, goggles and respirators. If possible, all water receptacles should be filled before the fire season, and kept filled at all times. If one opts for the

"wetter water" system the ingredients should be available alongside the water receptacle, ready for instant mixing before heading out to the blaze. If you take vehicles into the burning field, for example bakkies or tractors carrying equipment, pumps, spare water etc it is preferable to leave their engines idling in case a quick escape is needed, and better still, that the driver remains with the vehicle. At the very least, the key should never be removed from the ignition while a fire is being fought. Any livestock in the field should be herded to safety before any firefighting commences, and you should have a continuous strategy planned in your mind whereby the animals can be kept moving ahead of the fire, from field to field and even, if necessary, on to a



Fighting fire using different equipment.

road or into a neighbour's land. The last thing you want is for your animals to become trapped and burned, or to

have them panic and attempt to escape an approaching blaze by running through fences. 🌿

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Smallholders who wish to help to raise and maintain awareness of

the plight of bees and other pollinators should download the gardening app Candide SA to their smart phones.

Candide's campaign #PolliNationSA is calling on participants countrywide to take photos of the flowers they see which are being visited by bees. Then participants upload the pictures with the caption #PolliNationSA.

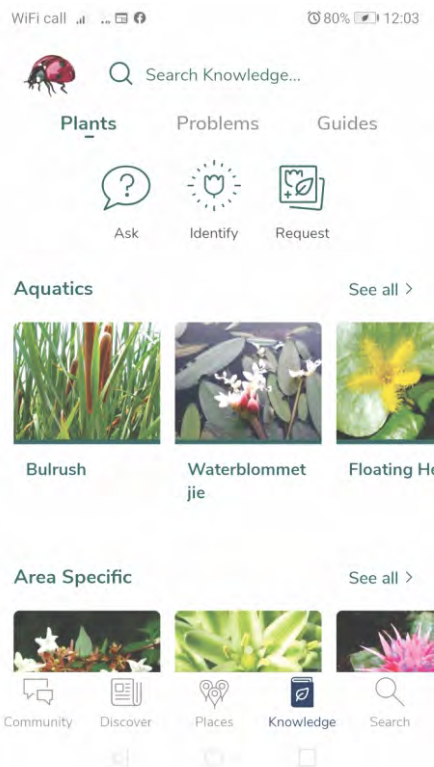
Once posted, users will receive a #PolliNationSA icon that will be added to their Candide profile picture confirming their pollinator status. The app is also going

to keep tabs on where the pollinators are, so that users can see which region

(province) has the most pollinators. Those who enter will automatically be added to the campaign's countrywide map depicting the spread and reach of the growing movement.

Candide is a free app, available on the App Store or Google Play, focusing on gardening. It offers help with plant and flower identification, along with information on planting and growing, as well as pests and diseases of plants.

Smallholders need no reminding that pollination is a fundamental process for the survival of our ecosystems. Nearly 90% of the world's wild flowering plant species depend, entirely, or at least in part, on animal pollination, along with more than 75% of the world's food crops and 35% of global agricultural land. Not only do pollinators contribute directly to food security, but they are key to conserving biodiversity. 🌱



BOOKSHELF

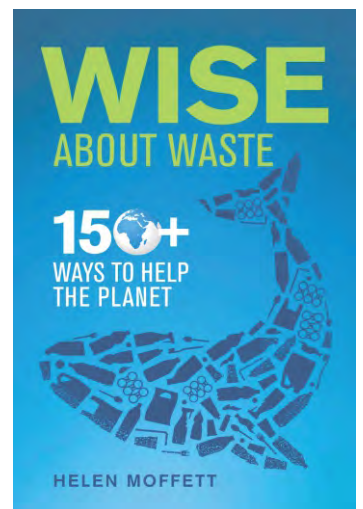
From previous page

price for this paperback is R130.00.

Wise about Waste ~ 150+ Ways to Help the Planet covers energy and water, consuming, recycling, plastic, clothing, home and family, food, celebrations and transport. It also discusses citizen activism and whether the planet can be saved. The tips are practical, often inexpensive and motivational and the book also has a useful set of checklists and other resources.

Moffett does not shy away from confronting the reality of the crisis, nor from making suggestions that she knows will be regarded as controversial. On the other hand, the book places a refreshing emphasis on environmental practices that involve the whole family. The recommended price is R220.

Both books are available in book shops and as e-books Kindle and Kobo. 🌱



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DIARY & FARMERS' MARKETS

With the restrictions on gatherings during the Covid-19 lockdown we have omitted our regular Diary section and our list of Farmer's Markets from this magazine, as for the most part the events listed have been either cancelled or

postponed. Once we have clarity from government as to when and in what form these events can reopen we will resume publication in our regular editions. Some farmer's markets may, however, still

be operating, on the basis of home deliveries of agricultural produce. If you are a regular visitor to a farmer's market, therefore, it may be worth contacting the organisers to see if this is the case.



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Saved by the bellow

This past Christmas a single young man of my acquaintance, (let's call him Fred), did a tour of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and one of the pre-arranged highlights was to be a visit to a distillery. Knowing this, his boss, something of a whiskeyphile, told him to buy something really, really special. This, said the boss, the company would pay for, and said bottle would only be opened in celebration of something really, really special, such as the unveiling of a new branch of their chain of shops.

Thus it was that Fred visited the Jameson's distiller in County Cork where he was allowed to bottle his own bottle of 25 year old Jameson Extra Special Reserve.

To which the master distiller affixed a fancy hand-written label, and added a hand-written certificate of authenticity, the bottle and label and the certificate then being placed with due reverence into a special box, which was duly sealed with sealing wax.

Naturally, this little effort came at some price, and it would be ungentlemanly of me to reveal just how much, so let's just say that the amount was roughly similar to the GDP of a small African state.

Fred proceeded to carry this bottle in his luggage through Ireland, Wales, Southern England and home, where he deposited it in what he calls his "whisky drawer" in his office desk, the same drawer that he fills with all the presents given to him by suppliers, and from which he dispenses presents to customers when necessary.

Fast-forward to May. South Africa has been in lockdown for nearly two months, booze sales are banned, the populace is becoming desperate, and Fred is booked off work, seriously ill (with something other than the 'rona), not able to speak clearly, anxious, ratty, depressed and high on some serious prescription drugs.

Meanwhile, in the evening of Day 50 of the lockdown, at Fred's house, his lodger (let's call her Caroline) had retired to her bedroom for the night to read. By and by she heard Fred, in the lounge, answer his phone. "Mutter mutter, yes... yes, of course... NO DON'T OPEN IT!!!!!!!" (SHOUTY caps intended). From years of arguing with his siblings and yelling at the television during rugby matches Fred has very well developed lungs, and the volume and anguish of his bellow brought Caroline out of her room at a sprint.

What had happened? Was Fred hallucinating?? Had he had a fit? Had he fallen off the couch???

And thus did the tale unfold. One Little Johnny, the son of one of Fred's friends at work, turned 18 on Day 50 of the lockdown. And so the father, we'll call him Claude, wanted to give Little Johnny something special for his birthday.

A really nice bottle of whisky, perhaps... But there's a ban on sales of booze because of the lockdown.

So, knowing Fred usually has a stock of normal Jamesons and other whiskies in his whisky drawer, Claude turned to his old friend for help.

Would Fred let him have a bottle of whisky to give to Little Johnny, said bottle to be replaced after the lockdown?

Of course, said Fred, and he phoned his secretary to tell her to give Claude a bottle from the whisky drawer...

And so, over at Claude's house, Little Johnny was duly presented with his father's gift, and father and son set about opening the box, to enjoy the rite of passage of Little Johnny's first legal drink.

But the lockdown, and the booze sales ban, had resulted in Fred's whisky drawer becoming depleted, until very few bottles remained, including the special sealed box, the significance of which had escaped Fred's secretary. So, when told to give a bottle to Claude she had done so, not wishing to disobey an order from her quite clearly sick and unhappy boss.

And Claude, likewise, thought nothing of it (Fred often spreads largesse of presentation bottles about), until he and Little Johnny battled to open the case because of the unique wax seal. And then, of course, he saw the hand-written label....

And to his eternal credit (Claude is a bit of a dipsomaniac), he realized something wasn't right, and phoned Fred. "Fred, are you SURE I should give this bottle to Little Johnny?" "Yes, of course, why not?" "Well, we battled to break the box open, and the bottle's got a hand written... .."

So poor Little Johnny will have to wait a little longer for something special to drink, and it sure as hell won't be a 25 year old Extra Special Reserve.



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