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... and more ...



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**FRONT COVER**

Read about treating ticks in sheep and goats in this edition.

## COMMENT, by Pete Bower While we weren't looking...



Many ~ most ~ of us said goodbye to 2020 and entered the New Year buoyed by the hope that 2021 would be a profound improvement on what was, indeed, a horrible year last year.

It took only a few days, however, for the reality of our situation to dawn on us: this year promises to be no better than last, and may be even worse. And next year, too, may be no better than this.

Much of the "horribleness" of last year and this (and next?) is that much of what was familiar and routine has been upended, trashed and discarded.

Our very way of life has been altered as a result of the adjustments we have made, and had forced upon us, by the pandemic as much as by the authoritarian decrees of our rulers.

Who would have thought, in January last year, that schools, parks, borders and beaches would be closed, places of worship and entertainment severely curtailed, booze banned, and that we would all be subject to a pretty draconian curfew and wearing masks and sanitizing our hands every time we entered a shop?

And that's the obvious stuff; the stuff we have to deal with every day. There is much more afoot, that is changing our world even as we concentrate on surviving the Covid crisis.

For by no means all of it has its genesis in the pandemic crisis. Much was happening or beginning to happen long before the Covid crisis. Some of it is cultural and/or political, some of it economic, and some of it environmental.

And as South Africans who may feel put upon by the ineptitude and cack-handedness of our politicians and civil servants we can take heart: pretty much everybody worldwide is in the same boat.

Politically, a few years ago, observers of international political trends noticed a marked shift in many countries to a conservative nationalist political and social framework.

Perhaps nowhere was this better illustrated than in the USA, where the rise of Trumpist conservatism culminated, as it perhaps inevitably would, in a deadly riot around and inside the Capitol on January 6.

By the time you read this Trump will have slunk off to his gilded Florida bolt-hole and Joe Biden will have set about restoring some form of political equilibrium in Washington and the US, but similar nationalist, sometimes racist, and often anti-democratic, trends persist elsewhere ~ even here.

The big elephant in the room is the environment, and sad to say, while we've been concentrating on the pandemic and the like, a group of 17 scientists have put together a report that shows that the planet is in a far, far worse state than we had previously been led to believe.

And worse, observing that world governments have consistently and collectively missed every cut-back target ever set, there is very little chance of the necessary cut-back targets ever being met in the future.

In their own words, "The planet is facing a 'ghastly future of mass extinction, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals' that threaten human survival because of ignorance and inaction," warning that "people still haven't grasped the urgency of the biodiversity and climate crises." This publication does not believe such a view to be alarmist. Alarming, yes. But not alarmist.

Species are becoming extinct at a terrifying rate, the oceans are, as we know, now a cesspit of plastic and filth, forests are burning like seldom before and in South Africa, there is a very good chance of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable citizens going short of the very basics for life, namely food and water.

The basic problem, and the reason why the world consistently misses emission reduction and other conservation targets, say the scientists, is because of our need, real or imaginary, to increase production to meet increased consumption, wealth creation, consumerism and the like. One of the scientists behind the latest study calls this "growthmania" which he describes as a "fatal disease." At the heart of which, possibly but not totally, is a still-increasing, unsustainable, world population.

Is there anything we as South African smallholders can do to help save the day? The scientists believe not, saying that individual efforts at recycling, conservation and consumption-reduction are no longer enough. What is needed are state-mandated, enforceable cutbacks. Which we all know are never going to happen in our lifetimes. As a result, we are doomed. Simple as that.



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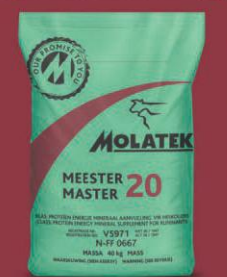
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# Covid 'cure': A cynic's view

**S**ir ~ Perhaps, for the enlightenment of those people who are hell-bent on advocating Ivermectin as a remedy, treatment or cure for the coronavirus, a biology teacher could give a lesson on the difference between an internal parasite and a virus. As I understand it, a parasite ~ at least the kind that is commonly treated in livestock using Ivermectin ~ is a worm, or fluke, that finds itself in a conducive environment such as a stomach or intestine or other such organ, and attaches itself to the lining of

said organ, from which it draws nutrients and grows and multiplies. Thus, introducing a substance such as Ivermectin, which is fatal to the parasite, will kill it and render the environment in which it found itself toxic for a period thereafter, preventing the growth of baby parasites. Clearly, the trick is to introduce sufficient of the targeted poison (for that is what a substance such as Ivermectin is) to kill the targeted parasite, without harming the host, namely the sheep or cow. By what stretch of the imagination could something which kills intestinal worms in livestock be useful in combating a virus which attacks the

lungs of humans? Viruses are a completely different type of organism, which attack the body in a completely different way to parasites.

Sure, there are instances where the side-effects of a drug made for something else have been found useful, but they've only been prescribed for such use after long, careful scientific testing ~ not because of anecdotal "evidence" presented in internet babblegrounds. To suggest that Ivermectin could be a "cure" for coronavirus is no different, in my view, to suggesting that when your car won't start you should pump the tyres.

And to those who say they have "proof" that Ivermectin is a cure: sure, if you take Ivermectin, it is very true that you probably won't die from Covid complications. But there is a very good chance that you may die from Ivermectin poisoning instead. Besides, by leading gullible people on a wild goose chase of absolutely no proven clinical value, those who advocate this quackery are depriving farmers of a staple stock remedy, because there's now a shortage in the shops.

**Henry Bosworth**  
Leeuwherk

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## How accurate are standard rain gauges, actually?

**S**ir ~ Your (use of a) "standard rain gauge" is misleading (*Smallholder* October 2020). I collect rain in the same five inch funnel, the official correct size or 127mm, and measure it in the calibrated inverted cone (the commercially-available standard rain gauges). I also measure it in a calibrated glass beaker by Jaytec, from a supplier of scientific instruments, so I am assured it is accurate. The cone measures about

1mm short for every 10mm of rain, sometimes a fraction more and sometimes a bit less.

For instance, I have just measured the rain for the past couple of days. The cone read exactly 10mm, the beaker 11.4mm.

So virtually every farmer and smallholder is recording less rain than actually falls.

I believe that the calibrations on the cone are not accurate. I wonder what the SA Weather Service uses?

And why record the rainfall in yesterday's diary?

What of all the rain that falls from midnight to this morning? We sometimes get very little rain yesterday, and heavy showers in the early morning today.

I know you are supposed to measure the rain at 0800 hrs, but it's cold and wet and the mud is sticky (at that time of day).

So I wait for the squalls to blow over, then I venture up the hill. The results are

recorded in today's diary.

**Michael Stuttaford**  
Stellenbosch



Scientific beaker.

# MAILBAG

## My neighbour's chicken carcasses are a serious problem

**S**ir ~ I am hoping you or a reader can help: I'm trying to find out about disposal of chicken carcass on smallholdings. The occupants of a plot near me run a small chicken

business, but they lose about 20-30 chickens every month. These get thrown on to a pile to decompose and smell really bad and attract flies. What would be a better method of disposal and are

there any laws regarding this?

**Anonymous**

Via Facebook

*If anyone can assist this reader with a solution, or if any legal boffins know the bylaws around disposal of chicken*

carcasses, please email us at [gautengsmallholder@gmail.com](mailto:gautengsmallholder@gmail.com) or call us on 011 979 5088.

~ Editor



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# NEWS

## Localised flooding wreaks havoc in Vanderbijlpark

**B**ecause good rains fell earlier on the Highveld this year than they did last, many smallholders have the feeling that the rains generally have been "better" this year.

But, with the exception of destructive localised flooding in the southwest of the province, namely the smallholding areas of Vanderbijlpark West, the total rainfall over the rest of

Gauteng this season would appear to be only very slightly wetter than last year.

By the middle of January, in the east of Gauteng at least, a total of 565mm of rain was measured since the start of

the rainy season. This compares with 490 mm up to mid-January 2020.

The flooding last month in the southwest, however, was another thing entirely.

Continued on next page

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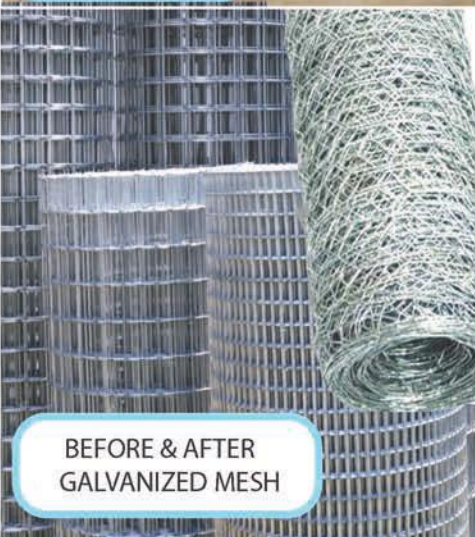
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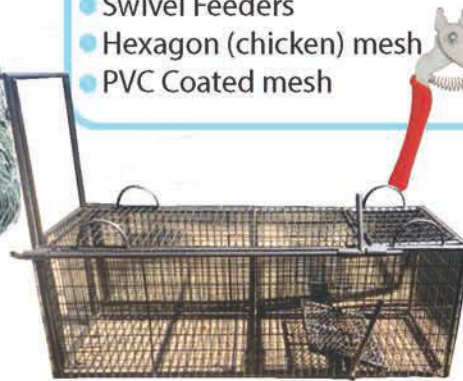


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## Financial assistance: Nedbank's netting

**W**ant to grow your crop under shade cloth but can't afford the netting? Nedbank offers a finance solution specifically for farmers and smallholders who want to grow under netting.

Nedbank senior manager for agriculture, Maluta Netshaulu, points out that not only does shade cloth protect crops from hail, frost, sunburn, wind and birds, but it also results in reduced water usage, a drop in energy consumption and a

reduction in the need for fertiliser.

"As money experts, it makes sense for us to assist the producer to overcome possible production problems, because that ensures that they can repay us. Our support

sees to it that a client who might have a contract to supply vegetables, fruit or flowers is able to meet their commitments."

He adds that as the "green bank", Nedbank is mindful of

Continued on next page

# FLOODS

From previous page

Initial reports that the cause of the flooding was because the sluice gates of the Vaal Dam had been opened were incorrect.

By that stage the Vaal Dam was still no more than about 70% full.

Rather, very heavy localised downpours in southwest area over a number of days saw the Rietspruit come down in spate, bursting its banks and flooding its lower reaches. The Rietspruit finds its source on the ridge to the south of Zakkaria Park and flows through or past Orange Farm, Evaton and Sebokeng, and through the flat lowlands of Mullerstuine and Nanescol before joining the Vaal at Loch Vaal.

Smallholders in these low-lying areas, and along the lower reaches of the Vaal around Loch Vaal and the

Barrage suffered significant damage and losses through the floods, the fast-moving waters of which were often laden with debris, including any movable farming infrastructure, small livestock etc. To rescue stranded residents, emergency services personnel, assisted by volunteers from the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) Station 22 at Deneysville, and even an SA Airforce Oryx helicopter, were called in, while a number of roads in the area where closed to the public.

Apart from the loss of

infrastructure such as beehives, fencing, roofing, fodder etc, the flooding caused significant damage to homes, electrical equipment, boreholes, septic tanks, roadways and crops in fields. 🌿

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# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

## So you want to start a vegetable business...

The success of your vegetable growing efforts this summer might have got you thinking ~ perhaps you should start a vegetable growing business. Of course feeding your family and some friends is quite different from setting up an

### Does your land have what it takes?

income-bearing enterprise, and there are many factors to consider: your knowledge, planning ability, experience, finances or access to funding. And your resources. On the face of it, the most important question would

appear to be: does your smallholding physically lend itself to this form of agriculture? The nature and quality of the soil is one of the most important considerations, for if it is not suitable, remedial

measures could be expensive, labour intensive and time consuming. There are soil testing kits and meters available which will enable you to test the nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium content and the acidity level

Continued on next page

## FINANCE

From previous page sustainability, as well as support for biodiversity. "We acknowledge that our agricultural clients are subject to the effects of climate

change and this is one of our innovative solutions."

The repayment term of a shade cloth loan is five years (60 months).

Nedbank also offers a finance solution for farmers battling with the effects of load shedding and high energy costs on their electrical supply, in the form of products to assist in the establishment of renewable energy infrastructure.

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shedding and rising energy costs can consider various renewable-energy finance options, with extended repayment terms of up to ten years on business loans.

The loans are subject to the usual requirements of credit checks, proof of cash flow, which must show that the business generates enough cash flow to repay a bank loan on time, and collateral, where you use property or goods as security against a loan which will be forfeited if

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For more information on shade netting and other agribusiness solutions, email [agriculture@nedbank.co.za](mailto:agriculture@nedbank.co.za).

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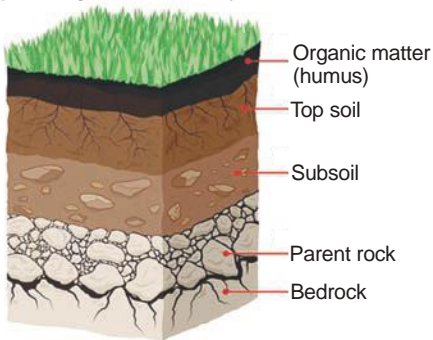


# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

From previous page

(pH) yourself, but if you are to do the enterprise on any scale it is worth the expense of having your soil tested by a professional laboratory that will advise on more technical aspects such as the macro-nutrient and micro-nutrient content. These tests might seem expensive, but their use will save you a great deal of heartache later.

You can do a simple manual test to establish if the soil is sandy, clayey or loamy. Generally, loamy or humus soil is regarded to be the best soil type for vegetable planting. See our May 2018



Soil profile.

edition in the archives on our website, [gautengsmallholder.co.za/magazine-archives/](http://gautengsmallholder.co.za/magazine-archives/), for DIY soil tests.

Also check the depth of topsoil, which is the uppermost layer of soil that contains organic matter, providing plants with the nutrients they need for strong roots and healthy growth.

For vegetables an average topsoil depth of 90-100cm is recommended, although this varies according to the vegetables that you choose to grow. (This does not mean that the vegetables actually

root to those depths, just that there is sufficient depth of nutrient rich soil in which they can set roots to whatever depth they require.) Examine the geology of the area to establish if it's a dolomite area. Dolomite rock formations underlie large areas of

Gauteng, creating the possibility of sinkholes or subsidence occurring. But a dolomite area can also contain underground reservoirs of considerable size. An old rule of thumb used to be to see where the large Portuguese market garden farms were located, because one could be sure there would be a good source of water underneath.

Dolomite is also dependent on stability in ground water and surface water systems and scientists have noted that climate change may also impact the hydrological regime of the region.

Be sure that there is not much ouklop in the land. Ouklop is a hard layer of accumulated iron and manganese oxides which cannot be cut with a spade when wet ~ obviously to be avoided if you want to set up rows and rows of vegetables.

A subsoil layer of ouklop also hinders drainage.



Drilling a borehole: Expensive but necessary

For vegetables, after soil, water is the key. You will need lots of it.

For most of us in Gauteng this means a good borehole (see the point about Portuguese market gardens above), either as a main water supply or to augment the municipal supply one enjoys to one's house,

Continued on next page

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# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

From previous page  
although the use of municipal water for a commercial vegetable operation will render the exercise unprofitable.

The quantity of water needed to grow vegetables at an optimum yield can be very high.

According to the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), 15-20mm of irrigation is needed

once a week. Thus, vegetables cultivated on 1 000m<sup>2</sup> (ie, a patch of land about 25m x 25m) require 15 000 litres (or 15kL to 20kL) a week; for a crop that grows for 90 days, that amounts to 192 000-262 000 litres (or 192-262kL) per 1 000m<sup>2</sup>. To irrigate 1ha of land, ten times that amount, or 1 920-2 620kL of water, will be required.

If there is already an irrigation system installed, will it suit what you want to grow? Irrigation systems must be suited to the soil

and crops produced, or the yield will be greatly reduced. The system must be manageable and well maintained. Irrigation with any kind of pump also requires a reliable electricity supply.

Irrigation systems vary greatly in the amount of water they deliver and the efficiency with

which they do so. The most efficient delivery of water, ie the least amount of water used, for large-scale vegetable growing, is by drip irrigation, in which South Africa (and Israel) are world leaders.

The use of drip irrigation requires planning even before the first seedling is put into the ground, as everything is (usually) done in multiples of 30cm, being the (usual) distance between drippers in a standard dripper line.

## After harvesting

You will also need additional infrastructure, in the form of post-harvest handling and packing space, and storage with, possibly, refrigeration. The location of the plot is also important. Is the area suitable in terms of climate and rainfall for vegetable production?

It also helps to be close to your market, which could be a municipal market, or the



A successful crop of cabbages.

traders, shops, restaurants or institutions you intend to supply.

If you are thinking of exports, are you close to an airport or export cargo handling facility? (We are, in Gauteng, luckily). Look at the condition of the roads in your area.

Transporting your precious cargo will be slowed down by

Continued on next page



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# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

From previous page  
poor, potholed road surfaces.  
Are you close to sources of  
labour? Unless you provide



Will you need a bakkie or small truck  
to transport your produce?

accommodation, consider the  
transport costs of bringing staff  
to work. And, remember,  
much of your labour force will  
be seasonal. Give some  
thought to what seasonal  
workers are to do in the off-  
season ~ a particularly  
important aspect if you spend  
money and time on training  
them in technical aspects, eg  
as pruners, and want them to  
come back to you season  
after season.

## Land requirements

What size plot will you need  
to meet all your require-  
ments? It is feasible to run a  
productive smallholding on a  
surprisingly small number of  
hectares, but this requires  
careful planning and manage-  
ment of your resources. Your  
choice of vegetables to grow  
might depend on the area at  
your disposal.

What about the neighbours  
and their activities. Operating



Rich soil will produce a high yield.

a successful farming operation  
will be easier if you have a  
good relationship with your  
neighbours and if they do not  
do anything that might affect  
your crop, such as spraying  
chemicals.

It will be a bonus if your  
property has good fences and  
other forms of security, as  
installing from scratch will be  
expensive. Given the levels of  
poverty and hunger in our  
country today, theft of  
vegetables is a very real  
threat.

Vegetable production is  
intensive and expensive, with  
high input and labour costs,  
and the exercise requires  
optimum yield and quality to  
make a profit. Costs are  
directly related to all of the  
factors listed above, along  
with further infrastructure and  
equipment. If money is not  
available for all the inputs that  
you need for large-scale  
vegetable production, then  
start small and expand as you  
grow.

But perhaps the biggest  
mistake new smallholder  
farmers make is to start  
growing without having  
established a market before-  
hand. Then, when the  
tomatoes are turning red on  
the vine, the cabbages are  
balling up nicely, or the  
broilers are big and fat (and  
hungry) they wail "I've got all  
of this stuff ready to sell, but  
nobody to sell it to..."  
Establish contact with your  
intended market before you  
break ground to see if there  
is, indeed, a viable market for  
what you intend to do, and  
hopefully to get some  
estimate of your projected  
costs, selling price, and  
profit. 🌱

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## Treating for ticks in sheep and goats

Parasites can kill. That's why smallholders with sheep and goats should be paying special attention to external parasites such as ticks. There are a number of options for treating and preventing tick infestations in your flocks and herds, some more effective than others. A tick infestation is bad news for your livestock. They carry diseases that can be fatal, they can cause anemia and weakness in your animals and their presence can also affect the quality of wool your sheep produce. Tick treatment should form part of every livestock health management plan. The intensity of treatment will be dictated by how bad an infestation is ~ this in turn



Ticks to look out for.

will differ based on the weather, the environment in which your animals are kept, and how many you have. Treatment solutions have various lengths of effectiveness, varying from a few weeks to a few months. Owners should monitor their animals, checking their skin regularly for the presence of the parasite. This way you will be able to assess how regularly you need to treat your flock or herd. Apart from injectables, there are three main ways of treating and preventing ticks in sheep and goats: a pour on solution, a spray race or a dipping tank. For smallholders with only a few animals, say between one to around 30, a pour-on solution will be easiest and most cost-effective. There are a number of options of product. Some you pour down the sheep's spine, some across the shoulders, others in the groin area. Whichever product you choose, you must be sure that the liquid

solution has reached its way through the wool and fur and on to the skin. Product that runs off the animal before reaching the skin will be ineffective.

You will need two people for this method, but little else. Using a shepherd's crook (or by hand if you're quick), one of you will catch the animal by a hind leg. The other person then pours the solution on the area of the animal indicated on the product's instructions, ensuring you are using the correct amount and getting it as soaked in as possible. Some solutions require you to treat the groin and armpit area, so you will need to turn the sheep into a seated position, which will definitely require two people. You can also use a neck clamp, designed to hold an animal in place by the neck. Some of



Holding a sheep on its back exposes its underside.

these are turnable, so you can swivel them around, upending the animal on to its side or back for ease of access to its underside.

You will need a way of remembering which animals have been treated ~ best is to release the animal directly into a separate paddock or pen, so that you can keep

Continued on next page

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From previous page

track of those treated and those still to be done.

With this option, you will have exact doses per animal so almost no waste.

A more sophisticated way, suitable for smallholders with larger flocks or herds (say 30 and up) is to construct a spray race. You have two options: an automated one or hand spraying, both of which are best done in a crush.

Make your crush long enough for three or four animals to stand head to tail one after the other with little to no space in between ~ not for nothing is it called a crush. A crush can be built out of old wooden poles, or farm gates.

To build a crush that will be useful for a number of activities, one that is open on both sides, but with the option of closing one side off with some sort of solid material, is best.

With both sides open you can inspect or spray your animals on both flanks with ease. Covering one side will encourage the animals to turn their heads to the open side, which will assist you when dosing orally, checking teeth etc: you will be able to simply go down the line, with each head pointing towards you.

But back to spraying. To spray, you will need a spray lance with quite a strong flow ~ not a misting spray. A backpack sprayer is cheapest and easiest, and of course this process will go quicker with two, one

person on either side. When spraying, you need to ensure you are using sufficient fluid to saturate the animal's wool or fur ~ the liquid must reach down to the skin. You must also ensure you are wetting the underside of the animal. A handheld lance makes this easy, simply pointing the nozzle up under the animal to reach their bellies, groin and armpit areas.

Building an automated spray race is costly, so is best suited to larger numbers. You can order ready-made ones that

can be assembled on your property, or you can build your own. If you decide to go this route, you will need to build a crush that incorporates the pipework, spray heads etc. The spray heads should be directional, with some aimed upwards from a low level to cover the animals' undersides.

The system will need a feed tank for premixed spray solution, a suitable small high-pressure pump, and some way of safely removing any runoff.



A spray race with pipes fitted.

The benefit of this is that it can be done with minimal effort on your part, simply funneling the animals into the crush, through the spray race and out the other end.

Continued on page 22



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# ANIMAL HEALTH

From page 19

However, if you picture a hose pipe turned on and off frequently, your system will drip solution every time you switch it on and off to allow more animals in. This



Handheld sprayers work effectively on most livestock.

becomes wasteful.

With either a handheld spray or an automated spray race, you will be able to measure fairly exact quantities of fluid, so your leftover solution will be minimal.

A dipping tank, while highly effective, is costly to build and use. Because of this initial outlay in cost, they are more suited to very large flocks.

If you choose this option, you will need to find a space on your property on which to

build the tank. Your tank must be a straight structure, lined to prevent leaks and with a slope at either end to allow the animals to easily walk in and out without tripping or slipping. Your tank should be deep enough to fully submerge your animal up to their backs, but not so deep that they are unable to hold their heads above water.

You will fill the tank with your diluted solution according to the specs of the product.

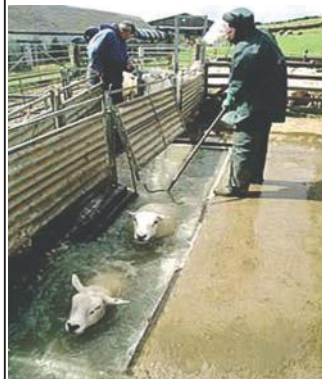
Funnel your animals through the tank, ensuring they spend enough time submerged for the fluid to penetrate their wool or hair.

Depending on the number in your flock you may need to replenish the tank during the process.

But what to do with your solution once used? You definitely should not empty it into a drain or anywhere where it could infiltrate your groundwater or septic tank.

Small amounts can be poured on an area of ground where nothing is growing ~ be aware that it may affect the ecology of this area by not only killing the parasites it is designed for but also other good insects. Your best option is to leave it in the tank, covered, and hope that it can be re-used.

All paraticides have an active ingredient, identified in simple terms, by a number in the top corner of the label. To prevent the parasite you are treating from developing an immunity to any one ingredient, many believe that one should rotate such treatments regularly by using different products each time, thus exposing the parasites to different active ingredients each time. 🌱



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## Ridding your plants of fungi in summer

**W**e always welcome good summer rains, but the downside sometimes is an increase in fungi that thrive in damp conditions.

Many garden diseases are caused by fungi, which are parasitic plants that can attack all parts of the plant. Although very small, they can sometimes be visible. Some fungi only attack one variety of plant, while others can attack a wide range.

Fungal spores are very tiny bodies that are easily distributed by wind, water, insects and other agencies such as clothing, footwear, etc.

Symptoms of fungal infection are the appearance of, for example, a powdery substance on and under the leaves, rotten patches or spots on the leaves, fruits and stems and wilting caused by root rot.

The first step in preventing diseases is to have a good understanding of the "disease triangle". Diseases can occur only when the following three components are present at the same time: a susceptible host plant, a pathogen capable of causing disease and an environment conducive to disease. Break the links in the triangle at any point and disease will not occur.

There are many chemical fungicides available for treating different diseases. If you decide on chemical control, take care to follow the instructions carefully and be sure that you wait the required length of time before harvesting the vegetables for consumption.

Many of these fungicides will have negative environmental effects and you might prefer to consider using a biofungicide.

Biofungicides are fungi or bacteria that are applied to the soil or foliage to prevent, stop, or control pathogenic bacterial or fungal infections in plants and plant roots. Using a biofungicide is a form of biological control, which is an environmentally sound method of controlling or suppressing pests and diseases using their naturally-occurring enemies or biological antagonists.

These beneficial microorganisms defeat pathogens in a variety of ways which include competition, producing antibiotics, parasitizing harmful organisms or inducing systemic or localized resistance in the targeted plant.

Most of these living organisms are packaged as powder, pellets, or are in a water-soluble form which are applied with backpack sprayers.

It is best if they are used preventatively. For biofungicides to eat pathogens, exclude them from plants, induce plant resistance, or improve plant growth and stress tolerance, they need to beat the pathogen to the plant. Microbes that produce antimicrobial compounds also work best if they are applied when disease levels are low. They must be reapplied frequently both to protect new growth and to ensure that effective populations of the microorganisms are present.

Biofungicides can be used on their own or can be part of an integrated pest management programme. They are environmentally friendly in that they do not leave chemical residues and have minimal or no effect on beneficial organisms and insects. They are non-toxic and safe for the person who is applying them, as well as the consumers of the vegetables. Usually there are short



Powdery mildew on cucumbers.

pre-harvest intervals, so you don't need to wait long before you can eat the vegetable after application.

Follow the instructions for storage and use them very carefully. Because they contain live organisms, biofungicides may be more sensitive to temperature, moisture, or UV light. Only mix what you are going to need and wear the protective clothing and equipment stated by the manufacturer.

Biofungicides cannot take the place of

Continued on next page

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## Common Highveld plants and their characteristics

Late summer is the ideal time to spend time in the wilder parts of one's plot getting to know some of the seasonal plants that will have sprung up among whatever it is that one may be trying to grow there. In

other words, the flowers and plants that one may consider to be weeds but which, in fact, very often aren't. For, what is a weed? One definition, a bit lighthearted to be sure, is that "a weed is a plant for which nobody has

yet discovered a use." Another is "a weed is any plant that is growing where you don't want it to." While there is a modicum of truth in both, they also both miss the mark. In the first case, there are

indeed plants which are considered weeds which have significant uses. Khakibos, an alien plant which smallholders will be well aware of, is a natural

Continued on next page

## PLANT HEALTH

From previous page  
proper cultural care. Your integrated approach will



Spraying for diseases.

focus on creating an environment for your vegetable plants to grow strong and healthy, so that hopefully the diseases will not be able to establish themselves or if they do, the plants will withstand their effects.

Fungal diseases such as anthracnose, powdery mildew and downy mildew affect cucurbits such as cucumbers, pumpkins, squashes and melons, as well as peas, onions, radishes and brassicas such as cabbage, cauliflower, kale, Brussel sprouts and broccoli. Anthracnose also affects

dwarf and runner beans.

Club root affects many brassicas.

Leaf spot affects beetroot, lettuces, celery, spinach, Swiss chard, sweet potatoes and tomatoes.

Fungal leaf blight affects carrots, while early and late blight affect potatoes and tomatoes. Fuserium wilt also affects tomatoes.

Chocolate spot and rust affect broad beans and dwarf beans.

Rust is a serious problem for asparagus.

Pink rot affects onions and sometimes leeks.

Bottom rot might affect lettuces and crown rot affects rhubarb.

Maize is susceptible to fusarium ear rot diseases, as well as grey leaf spot and leaf blight.

There are various biofungicides available online and at nurseries. 🌱



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# IN THE FIELD

From previous page

insect repellent, containing significant amounts of natural pyrethrins. The other common summer weed that all smallholders are aware of, the blackjack, is said to be a useful pet dewormer. Oxalis, the clover-like weed commonly found in flowerbeds, contains oxalic acid, while purslane, another common flowerbed weed, is edible and nutritious. And, of course, many weeds provide useful bee forage.

The second definition implies a frankly unhealthy control over what is growing where. Just because its presence in a bed or a field offends our human sense of horticultural order and cleanliness doesn't mean the plant shouldn't be there. And, indeed, it doesn't mean that its presence may not in fact be beneficial, for example to produce variety into what might otherwise be

a sterile monoculture, or, for example, as bee fodder in an otherwise barren landscape. Think companion planting of marigolds in one's vegetable patch, for example.

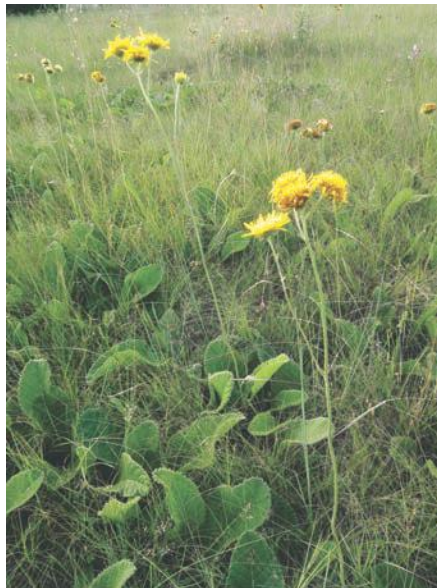
So, leaving aside the obvious ones, eg, khakibos, blackjack, etc, and the worst common

Category 1 invasive aliens we are legally bound to eradicate (see the resources section of our website for details) here follow some common plants growing on Gauteng smallholdings at this time of year, some of which are indigenous, others of which are, indeed, alien.

## ***Berkheya setifera***

This is one of a number of indigenous *Berkheya*s

found in Gauteng. *B. Setifera* is commonly called rasperdisseldoring, and is particularly common in south east Gauteng, Suikerbosrand and the like. It is a perennial plant spreading by means of underground runners. Thus, it is commonly found in dense



*Berkheya setifera*.

colonies. The plant has few leaves, close to the ground. The leaves are quite fleshy, and are spiny and hairy. A single tall stem emerges, leafless but spiny, at the top of which branching occurs, on which develop individual yellow daisy-like flowers. Because its leaves are so close to the ground it is unlikely that they will be cut when slashing the surrounding grass for fodder.

Continued on next page



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# IN THE FIELD

From previous page

## Mirabilis jalapa

Commonly called four o'clock, this erect shrub was cultivated as a pretty garden shrub as it grows into a rounded bush up to a metre or more in height and produces a profusion of vivid mauve blooms in summer. It is a frost-sensitive annual plant that emerges from a tuberous perennial taproot, and is found, in the wild, in disturbed ground, most often where there is additional moisture.



Mirabilis jalapa

## Plectranthus comosus

Also called woolly plectranthus or Abyssinian coleus, this is not indigenous, and it's a nasty one. It is a Category 3 weed, grows easily in a variety of conditions, but particularly if given a little protection from the most direct sun and, if given a chance to go to seed, produces thousands, thus

spreading itself very rapidly. It can grow to a metre or more if left unchecked and has a mass of small purple flowers on a single stem. The best control, therefore, is to identify it before it has a chance to flower and to cut it down immediately. It can also reproduce vegetatively, ie, bit of stem left behind after cutting can take root and start growing themselves, so it is necessary after cutting down to remove everything, allowing the cut material to dry completely before shredding.



Plectranthus comosus

## Richardia brasiliensis

This ground-hugging weed from South America is commonly called tropical richardia. It commonly infests lawns, and will spread into

fields if left unchecked, where it will displace indigenous species. The tightly-spaced four leaves contain a small inflorescence of tiny (1-2mm) white flowers in the centre. These are

Continued on next page

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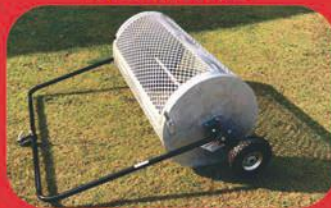
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## Bowford expands digital offering

As technology changes the way we do things, the *Smallholder* is also constantly evolving. As such, we have a number of new and improved features available for our readers in addition to this print magazine.

With the magazine appearing

only once a month, we recognise that we need to cater for the needs of readers with much greater frequency and have thus added a host of additional online activities and services.

Thus, last year, we introduced an online subscription service for the magazine. Readers

who wish to receive the magazine digitally can now do so, either by email, or by WhatsApp or, now, Telegram, at no charge. In the case of email subscribers, each receives a link which will take them to a digital version of that edition. WhatsApp and Telegram subscribers receive a PDF version of the maga-

zine which can be opened on their smart devices. Because of the time needed to print and distribute the magazine digital subscribers receive their copies at least a week before readers of physical copies do.

Our website also has an

Continued on next page

## IN THE FIELD



It is commonly believed that the pink flower pictured here is the richardia flower. Incorrect. This is an Oxalis flower. Richardia flowers are the little white flowers seen in the bottom right of area of this picture.

evidence that sheep will graze richardia if they encounter it in their paddocks, giving some measure of control. In lawns, one suggested method of control is to soak individual plants with a supersolution of urea (very strong nitrogen fertilizer) which will burn the leaves to destruction. The urea remaining in the soil will give the surrounding grass a useful boost as it seeks to recolonise the richardia space. 🌱

### References:

*Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Witwatersrand & Pretoria Region* by Braam van Wyk and Sasa Malan, published by Struik.

*Alien Weeds & Invasive Plants* by Lesley Henderson, ARC.

*The South African Plectranthus* by Ernst van Jaarsveld, 2006.

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From previous page enjoyed by foraging bees, making barefoot walking over a richardia-infested lawn hazardous in flowering season for anybody with a beesting allergy. The one good thing about *R brasiliensis* is that it is so low growing that it makes mowing a heavily-infested area virtually unnecessary. The plant is not frost-resistant, with the leaves quickly dying back in autumn, to emerge again after the first rains. There is some anecdotal

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## Stihl BC230 cultivator is effective for small weeds

Every year we plant a patch of dryland yellow maize which we use as chicken feed. The spaces on our plot all being designated for various purposes, our mielie patch is fixed, both in location and size. It measures

### A Smallholder product review

about 40m x 40m and comprises, like most of our ground, heavy clay soil that wouldn't be out of place in a brickyard quarry. As a result, to try to lighten

the soil we incorporate as much organic matter as we can, including running the dry mealie cobs, stalks and leaves through a chipper, spreading the material and ploughing it

in. This works well with our small tractor and two-share plough when there is nothing else growing, but the issue of cultivation once the mielies appear has become a problem: it's too small a patch

Continued on next page

From previous page

active news and information section where we provide our users throughout the month with content not seen in the magazine.

These take the form of short posts covering a variety of current and interesting topics as they arise.

This year we are also introducing Focus Weeks on our website ~ a whole week dedicated to in-depth coverage of one topic.

Some of these upcoming focuses include security on plots, pumps, tools and machinery.

Our website is also host to a large resources section including a variety of documents, forms and lists smallholders might need. In addition to their digital copies our digital subscribers also receive our separate mid-month bulletin ~ a quick-read PDF with seasonal stories and interactive advertising designed to keep readers informed in between the appearance of each month's magazine.

To reflect the changing nature of our business from a single-channel print publisher to a

publishing concern operating across multiple electronic media we have rebranded our operations to trade as Bowford Media across all channels.

Our holding company, however, remains Bowford Publications (Pty) Ltd, and from an advertiser's perspective there is no change to our arrangements.

Readers interested in receiving our digital communication can subscribe on WhatsApp at 0761767392, on Telegram by following our channel

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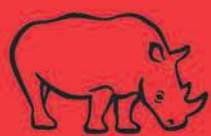
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From previous page  
to cultivate by tractor, we are opposed to the use of chemical weedicides (to protect our environment for bees and insects if for no other reason), and it's too large to cultivate by hand, taking three or four days of hoeing each time, when our labour could be better used elsewhere. So this season we invested in a small cultivator, choosing Stihl's smallest model, the BC230, from Green's Industrial Supply in Benrose. Powered by the same 1,55kW 40.2cc engine that is fitted to the FS230 mid-range

brushcutter, BC230 drives a set of four 250mm dia curved blades through a centrifugal clutch and gearbox, giving a working width of 30cm. At first glance the unit's handlebar appears excessive in relation to the machine, but you soon realise it is necessary if you are to have any control over the machine in operation. The handlebar itself is foldable for transportation, and the unit is fitted with two removable wheels for moving it from bed to bed.

The BC230 engine is a two-stroke pull-start unit and, designed for a brushcutter, it doesn't leak fuel if you need to tilt it or lie it on its side (for example to fit or remove the transport wheels). Starting is, like on all modern Stihl machines, easy enough after you have primed the engine with a couple of squeezes on the fuel bulb, and it will burble along motionless as the engine idles. Once you increase the revs, however, you'd better be hanging on to the

handlebar because the unit leaps forward like an unbroke colt as the centrifugal clutch kicks in and the blades start to rotate. Power from the engine is more than adequate. It never strains, and one gets the impression that no amount of use will wear it out. With your right hand controlling the throttle and both hands on the handlebar the machine is eager to move

Continued on next page



The large handlebars assist in keeping the machine stable.



The BC230 in use earlier this season.

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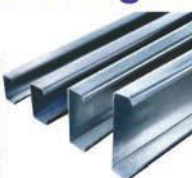
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## MACHINERY

From previous page forward and will pull you along behind at a fast walking pace if you let it. However, you want the blades to mash up the top few centimetres of soil as they rotate, so your job as operator is to hold it back, moving forward as slowly as you need to achieve a good tilth, ensuring that the weeds and growth are fully uprooted and mashed up in the process.

In actual fact this requires two or three passes over the same

strip, not only to ensure that everything is uprooted but also because there is a gap between the left and right blade sets to allow space for the drive-shaft from the engine. This results in a "middelmanntjie" of a few centimetres of uncultivated ground. Thus, doing two or three passes enables you to move the path of the machine a few centimetres each time to ensure that this strip falls directly beneath the path of one or other blade set.

To give the machine the required operational stability the handlebars are considerably wider than the machine itself. Thus, it can only really be used in a field where the crop is shorter than the height of the handlebars. This suits us fine in our mealie patch because we practice the Mayan form of "holy trinity" planting, intercropping our mealies

with runner beans, squashes and pumpkin. Thus, as soon as the squashes and pumpkin start to put out runners in the aisles between the rows it becomes impossible to use the cultivator. By this time the mealies themselves are at shoulder height so use of the cultivator



The gap between the two sets of blades means you have to do two or three passes over your ground.

would be impossible anyway. But one of the reasons for this form of planting is to inhibit the growth of weeds between the rows by depriving them of sunlight, which is achieved by the expansive coverage of large pumpkin leaves; another reason why the cultivator becomes superfluous.

Continued on next page

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# MACHINERY

From previous page

Running up and down the aisles between the rows means one takes out 90% of the weeds in one's crop. It doesn't, however deal with the weeds that grow up directly in the line of the crop. So what? we ask, and simply let this small number grow. Life's too short to worry about them... In addition to our mealie patch we also maintain a number of 30m long fixed beds for vegetables. These are brick-lined, about 50cm wide, and filled with our own soil mixture, which we replenish season to season with compost, wood chips and fertilizer, to ensure maximum yield from the plants we grow. This is an intensive growing operation and the beds are in constant use, with plantings succeeding one another throughout the year as they mature. While the major "maintenance", ie incorporation of compost and organic matter, and a good digging over, takes place in winter, we replenish nutrient through the busy growing months by sprinkling granular

fertilizer over the beds before seeding or planting with seedlings.

We have found that the BC230 works excellently in incorporating this fertilizer, and loosening and smoothing the top few centimetres into a fine seedbed in preparation of the next planting. And, because we can regulate the watering of these beds beforehand, we are assured of the ideal moisture level in the bed before we start.

Does the BC230 do what it is designed to do? Yes, and well, too, subject to a couple of observations.

❑ For best results, in our heavy soil at least, there is a very fine line between the soil being too dry, in which case the machine simply bounces along the surface kicking up a cloud of dust, and too wet, in which case the blades quickly



Transport wheel assembly is held in place by a pin and clip and is easily removed or attached if the unit is on its side.

become clogged with caked mud and weeds.

❑ The BC230 works best with small weeds, ie those no more than a few centimetres high. Bigger plants, and viney weeds, tend to become entangled with the blades, a problem that is exacerbated if one's soil is slightly too moist.

❑ This is not a rotavator or a tiller. It's a cultivator, designed to uproot and cut up

Continued on next page



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The engine is a two-stroke pull-start unit also used in the FS230 brushcutter and is powerful enough for the size of the machine.



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# MACHINERY



The blade sets are easily removed if you need to replace or sharpen them. Simply pull out the sturdy clip and slide off the axle.

From previous page  
vegetation which is still at seedling stage. As such, it works the top few centimetres only, and doesn't penetrate to any great depth. A benefit of this is that it leaves the lower soil layers undisturbed, hopefully also leaving earthworms and other subterranean creatures in peace.

Should you wish to achieve a greater working depth, or should you find your soil is a little drier than ideal, we have found that you can dig a little deeper by rocking the machine from side to side as you work, thereby forcing the lower blades deeper into the soil by a centimetre or two. ☐ If the rotating blades encounter a hard object, for example a rock (or the brick sides of our vegetable beds), or a large root, the machine will leap in the air and jump forward, or sideways, meaning it is necessary to have full

control of it while the engine is at high revs.

☐ Like all rotavators, the effect of the BC230 will be, in time, to break up the soil into finer and finer particles. To prevent this, we know we will have to incorporate lashings of organic matter each season, but we do that anyway in an effort to build up our soil season to season.

☐ The blades rotate with no protection at their outer extremities. Thus, should the

machine move suddenly to the left or right, there is a chance that the blades could mash up the plants growing in the row.

Certain other models have plant protectors, namely smooth solid metal discs about the size of a standard CD at each outer end, but that really is no more than a niggle as this is a fit-for-purpose machine of great use to anybody needing to weed large areas of their garden. 🌱

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Three photographs of livestock are displayed in a row, separated by a red diagonal line. From left to right: a close-up of a goat's head, two white sheep standing in a field, and a large brown cow standing in a field.

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## The benefits of a plot in lockdown

As everybody who lives on a smallholding knows, there are many advantages to plot life (and, yes, there are some disadvantages, too).

And never have the advantages been so apparent than during the Covid lockdown ~ particularly during summer. Why? Well, during the summer months we maplotters, if we grow our own fruit and veg, enjoy the most fruits of our labours.

For, not only is the stuff that we grow absolutely fresh ~ we eat tonight what we picked today ~ but it also means that one's need to travel to shops to buy food is greatly lessened.

On that subject, one can always tell a smallholder shopper in a local supermarket.

Apart from the fact that they are also normally the most appallingly dressed, they are the ones whose trolleys are filled with cleaning material and toilet paper and ~ when one can buy it ~ wine.

For the rest, such as meat, dairy products, fruit and veg, along with jam, preserves and the like, they are self-sufficient, or at least they know a neighbour with whom they can swap produce.

So, saving on shopping trips is one of our advantages.

Exercise is another. In our case, for example, my wife and I have taken to a daily walk around our fields, all six of them.

This (because I've measured it) is a daily stomp of more than 3km which, when added to all the other stomping about we do (eg to feed the fish in the pond in the morning, to the veg patch to collect the dinner, out to feed the chickens, to switch pumps on and off, etc, etc) makes up the recommended 10 000 steps a day one is supposed to take to maintain a modicum of fitness. For us, our daily stomp means we don't have to drive anywhere for exercise, and we don't have to pay fees (or risk catching the virus) at a gym or somesuch.

We have each other for company which in itself is not unpleasant, and we are able to enjoy our three boundy dogs as they scorch about chasing every bit of wildlife, real or imaginary, that they can find.

Truth be told, while we two humans both enjoy our daily walk our dogs would insist we take them if, for whatever reason, we decided to be lazy.

I have even cut a 2m wide track in the grass to make our stroll more pleasant.

But there's another aspect to a daily walk in one's field, especially in summer, that is pleasant and rewarding, and that's

to be able to stop and admire the flora which grows alongside and in amongst the grass. And here's the thing: Not everything that grows in a field of grass is an alien, or a weed.

Many of the flowers in your field are indigenous, beneficial in some way and are part of the natural Highveld ecosystem. It's fun both to realise this, and to identify what is growing in its rightful place, and to admire it.

Beautiful flowers are not only the big, colourful ones that one buys from a florist. Some of the loveliest are tiny, close to the ground ~ and fleeting: they may appear in the coll of the early morning and be gone by lunchtime, or they may bloom, shrivel and turn to seed in a matter of a day or two.

And very often they're not worth cutting and placing in a vase. By the time you've got them indoors they've wilted already. (Which says much about the breeding that goes into commercial cut flowers that can last in a vase for weeks).

Others are, of course, weeds. Noxious, alien or otherwise, but often they, too, have quite beautiful blooms.

Then there's the quiet on a plot, at least at night after the curfew. Apart from the occasional neighbourhood dog barking one can now hear, like in the bushveld, the insects calling and the frogs croaking. What bliss!

But what about the technicalities of life on a plot under lockdown, for example the ban on booze sales? Well, in this department one's Boy Scout training should kick in. "Be Prepared" is the watchword. You would, if you were a Baden-Powellist, have stocked up beforehand.

But if, like some (me), you were caught short, never believing that the teetotal killjoys in government would actually go to the lengths of forgoing the tax revenue and destroying a lucrative sector in the economy for a second time, it would have paid you to have palled up with your local shebeen owner before the lockdown began. You see? Having a shebeen around the corner DOES have its advantages. Especially in a lockdown.



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