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FRONT COVER

A shadecloth tunnel by Multiknit.

Read about shade structures and tunnels in this edition on page 15

COMMENT, by Pete Bower

An app to fight pom-pom weed



Although it is by far South Africa's smallest and most densely populated province, Gauteng is blessed with a number of game reserves, conveniently situated north, south, east and west of the Johannesburg-Pretoria conurbation.

Over the years, members of the *Smallholder* team have become regular visitors to two of these parks, namely the long-established Rietvlei Nature Reserve near Irene and the much newer, and larger Dinokeng Game Reserve east of Hammanskraal.

Rietvlei and Dinokeng each have unique histories and reasons for their existence. In the case of Rietvlei, for example, it contains the Rietvlei Dam, originally built in 1934 and raised in height in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is a major water storage for the city of Pretoria.

The reserve itself was established as a nature conservation area more than 90 years ago and is owned and managed by the City of Tshwane.

Dinokeng is much younger, officially being only ten years old, although it had an interesting gestation. Way back in 2000, 170-odd landowners in the area (the region was subdivided into small farms of 25 to 30ha each) discussed the idea of removing their boundary fences and opening up the land, much of which was already given over to game farming, to form a bigger reserve.

This, however, needed a formal legal framework, and the Gauteng government effectively had to draft and pass the legislation making this possible, approving the removal of internal fences and beefing up the perimeter fence. Thus, with the gradual introduction of the desired game species, the reserve opened officially only in 2011. What makes it unique is that the actual land remains owned by the 170-odd participating landowners, many of whom still live in their homes, and some of which have been repurposed into B&Bs, restaurants and holiday accommodation.

Thus, unlike Rietvlei which has only one original dwelling in the form of a Boer War-era farmhouse, now a tearoom, Dinokeng has a variety of accommodation, restaurants and camping sites ~ and even a craft brewery ~ within its perimeter. In addition, some of the original landowners opted not to participate in the scheme, so on one's drives in the reserve one comes across still-fenced land being used for commercial agricultural purposes. Plus, running through the reserve are three public roads, for example from Hammanskraal to Rust de Winter, and from Hammanskraal to the Moloto Road, which carry through traffic, albeit at a controlled pace.

There are other differences, too. Rietvlei's rhinos are dehorned (and have been poached in the past), Dinokeng's rhino management policy follows a different tack. Rietvlei's game population is different, too, and does not include lion, elephant or leopard, while Dinokeng advertises itself as Gauteng's only free-roaming "big five" reserve.

But both reserves face a common threat, namely being overrun by pom-pom weed. Rietvlei's infestation is much, much worse than Dinokeng's at this stage, and efforts to control the weed in the reserve have cost millions. But the weed persists, despite the introduction of a bio-control thrips by the ARC, and regular clearing parties by teams from the City as well as volunteers.

Indeed, taking overseas visitors on a drive through Rietvlei in summer invariably results in cries of "how beautiful! Look at that carpet of lovely pink flowers!!" Little do they know, of course.

Dinokeng's pom-pom weed problem is, currently, much less severe. Rather than extensive expanses of pink, outbreaks are still more limited, to manageable patches of fewer flowers here and there. Indeed, the visibility of its bright pink flower on its tall stem makes pom-pom weed easy to see, and thus cut off, thereby preventing the spread of seed from the flower once it has dried.

And Dinokeng has a wonderful tool that could be used to nip the spread of this weed in the bud (so to speak...). The park recently introduced a clever smartphone app that, among other features, has a dynamic game sighting page. Thus, visitors are able to share their sightings with others by dropping a pin on an interactive map which gives the species, the time of the sighting and the location to a few metres.

Adding a page to the map for sightings of alien plants, even of only three or four species (eg pom-pom weed, queen of the night, lantana, and bugweed), would enable park visitors to drop pins locating the weeds as they view game, thereby helping teams of workers to quickly pinpoint and prioritise areas where clearing operations could be most fruitful.

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“Collapseology” ~ basically, the world is doomed

Sir ~ I read your Comment in the February edition (*While we weren't looking*), and particularly your conclusion, namely that “we are doomed” and became

suitably depressed. Clearly, your view is shared by many, particularly scientists, around the world, who are now starting to do calculations to predict the date when, actually, the degradation of

the planet's ecosystems will be so complete that mankind will no longer be able to overcome the devastating effects thereof, not even with our so-called advanced technological skills.

There is even a name for this new branch of science. It's called “collapseology”. Why didn't you tell us that in your comment?

Natie Furlough
De Wildt

MAILBAG

Is your ward councillor adequate?

Sir ~ Many South Africans are not impressed by any political party at the moment. However, the local government elections will be coming up later in the year and I

would like to hear from your other readers what their experiences have been of their ward councillors. I think that at local level, because we are voting for a person, even if they represent a political party, we have the opportunity to support people

who get the job done. If your ward councillor is useless you can send them packing! In Ward 25 in Ekurhuleni we are fortunate to be represented by someone who is also a maplotter, so he understands our needs and challenges. Not only that

though ~ he is accessible and responsive. He understands the value of communication ~ even if he is unable to find a solution, he will ensure that we, his constituents, are kept

Continued on next page

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Another setback in livestock shipping battle

The Supreme Court of Appeal recently dismissed the NSPCA's application for leave to appeal a ruling of the Makhandia High Court, which allowed Middle Eastern livestock shipping company Al Mawashi to proceed with one of its shipments of live sheep to the Persian Gulf.

Taking to social media to trumpet the dismissal, Al Mawashi pointed out that this is the sixth case lost by the NSPCA at magistrate and high court level to prevent the practice of mass live animal transportation by sea.

Al Mawashi, which owns and operates a fleet of ageing converted livestock carriers, has built up a trade in mass transportation of sheep from the quiet port of East London, amassing the animals prior to shipment on a feedlot in Berlin, just inland of the city. The sheep are transported by sea up the East African coast, through seas that can reach temperatures well into the 20°C levels and across the equator, to Gulf ports, where they are discharged, and taken inland and sold for slaughter.

In announcing its "victory"

through the courts, Al Mawashi claimed that the costs of litigation incurred by the NSPCA "is estimated in millions of rands".

Although Al Mawashi correctly claims that live animal transportation by sea from South Africa is legal according to South African law, it then incorrectly claims that the practice is also legal "in every country of the world".

Many countries have far stricter controls over these practices, banning certain ships deemed to be unseaworthy, banning trade with

certain countries, and simply banning the practice outright. Some farmers, and others that support the practice, say that preventing the trade in live animals to the Middle East incurs losses for small sheep farmers in the Eastern Cape, from which Al Mawashi sources its cargoes.

Editor's comment: While mass live animal transportation by sea may, indeed, be legal according to South African law, there is clearly an inconsistency when the same country's animal cruelty

Continued on next page

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From previous page up to date.

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Pig owners warned to protect against Swine Flu

Swine flu is back on the radar, after the identification of cases in North West and the Western Cape. This follows outbreaks in Eastern Cape, Free State and Gauteng. As a result, all pig owners have been warned to be on the lookout for swine flu symptoms in their animals. While it is unclear where the virus originated, the Dept of Agriculture, Land Reform & Rural Development, together with the SA Pork Producers' Organisation are urging farmers and smallholders to buy pigs from reputable breeders with a proven clean health record. In some provinces, local

governments have put a temporary ban on the sale of pigs at auctions. Additionally, smallholders must also ensure their own facilities are clean, and that their pigs are healthy. African Swine Flu is a communicable disease, and any suspected cases must be reported to the nearest State Veterinarian.

In previous outbreaks, the state vet has placed areas under quarantine to prevent the spread while infected pigs are euthanased and their carcasses destroyed. Some tips for ensuring your piggery is of a high standard include ensuring hands are

washed before and after entering the piggery; using footbaths at the entrance of the facility and changing the fluid regularly; prohibiting anyone from eating near the piggery; disinfecting all delivery vehicles; regularly hosing down walls, floors and ceilings; using a good quality disinfectant, and cleaning, disinfecting and drying feeding troughs at least once a week.

If you suspect your pigs are sick, isolate those that seem poorly and work with them last.

Thoroughly wash your hands, change your clothes and use your disinfectant footbath

when leaving the isolation area.

Dispose of dead pigs properly; this includes burying them away from your piggery or burning the carcasses. Then disinfect yourself before returning to your healthy animals. 🌿

From previous page
legislation runs counter to these laws.

For, mass live animal transportation by sea is inherently cruel and inhumane, by any

rational standard.

Besides, there are more efficient ways to transport meat over long distances, namely by slaughtering the animals at source, and

shipping carcasses, deepfrozen, in containers.

It is time, therefore for South Africans to agitate to persuade the government to change the law. 🌿

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Community prepares for fire season together

To protect themselves against the annual scourge of veld fires a group of neighbours in Bredell on the East Rand have banded together to build their own fire trailer.

The residents of plots on Killarney and Charles Roads, Bredell, border open veld and after a number of devastating fires in 2020, during which the fire departments arrived more than 45 minutes after the first call had gone out, the community decided enough

was enough and collected donations to construct their own firefighting trailer. Holding a 1 000 litre tank, with two hoses totalling 92m in reach, the trailer is available at a moment's notice should a fire break out in that community.

The trailer is fitted with an 8.2bar pump, and has the ability to refill itself out of a pool, pond or water tank, should it need refilling during a blaze.

With five members of the area trained to use the trailer, and with direct access to it, this year's fire season will hopefully be far less damaging for the smallholders in that area, the residents believe.

Community member Richard Albrecht,

who helped design and construct the trailer, estimates it cost around R20 000 to put together using a combination of new and second hand items.

"We received very generous donations from the people in the community," he acknowledges.

Albrecht says the people in his neighbourhood have really banded together, helping each other out when they need to for safety and security reasons. With smallholders relying increasingly on themselves and each other, this is another example of community togetherness working for the greater good. 🌱



The trailer is easily hitched to a bakkie.



The trailer is fitted with PPE for those using it.

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Microchipping your livestock

Pet owners are familiar with the idea of microchipping their pets, so that they can be identified if they are lost or stolen.

However, the same concept can be applied to being able to identify a horse, cattle and other livestock, particularly if you have a pedigreed (and expensive) stud animal. So what is microchipping and how does it work?

A microchip is a permanent method of electronic identification. A microchip system consists of two parts: a microchip and a scanning

device.

A tiny computer chip is encased in a smooth and durable biocompatible glass. The bioglass has a coating which allows the tissue fibres within the animal to bond and grow around the microchip, holding it in place. The chip itself is about the size of a grain of rice and small enough to fit into a hypodermic needle.

In the case of a horse, the chip is injected into the nuchal ligament (the large ligament that runs on top of the neck, controlling the movement of the neck and head), where it stays for the life of the animal. In cattle it can be injected near the tail. The unique number coded on to the chip cannot be altered or removed.

It is advisable that the procedure be

done by a vet. animal it is far more reliable than descriptions of markings or other features.

The SAPS, local councils and animal welfare organisations are equipped with scanners, to prove identity should your animal be lost or stolen and then recovered.

This is the definitive proof of ownership. And, it ensures that the breeding and pedigree details are preserved and accessible.

It is forgery and tamper-proof. Microchipping is also compulsory should the animal travel abroad and for animals being imported or exported. Livestock owners need to ensure their contact details

are recorded on the database against their animal's microchip number and that these details are kept up to date. In nature, biologists use microchipping in wild animals to help them better understand the animals' movements and migration habits. 🌿



A microchipping kit.



Microchipping a horse in the neck.



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BEEKEEPING

Honey money ~ how easy is it to make?

There are beekeepers, and there are honey gatherers. That's the view of dedicated apiarists such as Mike Alter, secretary of the Eastern Highveld Beekeepers Association, who cautions newbie beekeepers from rushing into the craft believing there's a pot of gold under each beehive, (even if the honey extracted may, indeed, be a warm, golden hue).

How much honey one can get from one hive per year? This can vary from 15kgs to 90kgs, depending upon the type of beekeeping one does, says Alter.

"When you now extrapolate these numbers and have, for argument's sake, a price of R100/kg for honey, you can see the newbies' eyes getting larger and larger. This is what

'real' bee-keeping is all about!"

Quickly they'll multiply the R100 per kg by 90kgs (never the 15kg per hive) to estimate an income of R9 000 per hive per year. "Then, of course, they multiply R9 000 per hive by 1 000 hives and they're looking at an income of R9 000 000 per year! WOW, this is what it's all about!"

Sadly, reality is, well, somewhat different. As in any business you will have not only obvious overheads, but inefficiencies to deal with. Then there are capital equipment costs, for vehicles, hives, extraction and bottling equipment, premises to store,



clean and repair equipment, and to work the honey, places to place your hives, and

labour costs. Finally, and most importantly, markets will start playing a role in your hopes and expectations. "Successful entrepreneurs in the beekeeping fraternity have either started off at the bottom with a few hives or have had to hire a very expensive experienced manager to get somewhere," says Alter. "Experience cannot be bought. It is easy to see how smoothly a successful operation works."

Alter says no-one sees the bad part of the operation such as vandalism, theft, natural disasters, accidents and loss of experienced personnel, farmers not informing one of pesticide spraying programmes, and many other problems that crop up in the day to day running of the business.

"A smooth operation is always a result of hard work,

experience and the way you handle your disasters."

And, disasters aside, beekeeping means constant work and attention to detail for, while the bees get on with the tasks of making comb, collecting pollen and nectar, and turning the latter into honey, the beekeeper must spend hours repairing and refurbishing hives and frames, refitting foundation sheets, extracting honey, melting harvested wax, dealing with whatever propolis is collected, bottling the harvest, labelling, selling and distributing. And that's after ensuring the bees are housed in areas where there is good pollen and nectar available to them, where vandals, both two-and four-limbed can't get to them, checking the hives for pests and disease, and finally, when appropriate, removing only that amount of honey that will leave the hive with sufficient food for the lean times.

Smallholders who are interested in keeping bees have access to assistance, advice and support from one of three beekeepers associations in the province. All three associations welcome new beekeepers to their regular meetings and have active Facebook pages to keep members abreast of developments. The Northern Beekeepers Association (known as "Northerns") caters for beekeepers around Pretoria. For details call Riekie on 082 972-1889

The Southern Beekeepers Association ("Southerns") covers beekeepers in Johannesburg, West Rand and southern Gauteng. Email Lantz info@beekeepers.co.za

The Eastern Highveld Beekeepers Association ("Easterns") caters for beekeepers on the East Rand, as well as members in Mpumalanga. Call Mike on 083 430-8707 for details.

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SHADE CLOTH & TUNNELS

How to grow crops year-round in Gauteng

Although Gauteng's smallholders have a great many advantages over small farmers elsewhere in the country, notably in the form of their proximity to major markets, they have a couple of drawbacks which can limit the viability of their horticultural activity.

Chief among these is the relatively short growing season in Gauteng, particularly in the colder eastern areas of the province.

Conversely, in the short hot season, the sun and weather can be so fierce that crops can be ruined either by sunburn, or by violent weather, hail etc.

Fortunately, science and engineering have contrived to provide solutions which give prospective growers a range of options, across a range of commodity types, and budgets.

These range from growing under shade-cloth, to growing in unheated green-houses,

commonly called tunnels, to growing in heated green-houses where the expense of the heating equipment can be offset by the luxury of a year-round regular harvest.

And, at the extreme end of the spectrum, there is the option to grow high-value crops in sealed, temperature controlled grow rooms, under artificial light.

Coupled with what one covers one's growing area with, are options on what one grows the crop in, and how one waters it.

And here the options are in-



ground planting, planting in soil-filled containers such as grow bags, or using some form of

hydroponic growing system and medium. For the watering part the options range from conventional hand watering to some form of installed irrigation system using microjets, overhead sprinklers or drip lines. And,

of course, if one is using a hydroponic system one can couple the horticultural part of the enterprise to a fish farm, a set-up which

combined aquaculture with hydroponics and is named aquaponics.

Shade cloth structures

Shade cloth (or alternatively shade netting) is a woven polyester fabric made in different colours and with different transparency levels to allow for some control over the amount of light and shade thus provided.

Leading shade netting producer Multiknit has recently developed a red netting which filters sunlight

Continued on next page



A small hobby tunnel, ensuring year-round produce for your family. Image: Eco Tunnels



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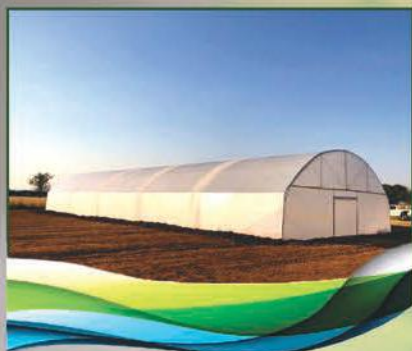
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SHADE CLOTH & TUNNELS



Multiknit's new red shade cloth.

From previous page
to deliver the most important parts of the light spectrum for plant growth, namely red and blue light, to the plants. Shade cloth is made UV-resistant, giving the cloth an endurance of ten to 20 years at least, dependent on a few factors such as wind, hail, sun intensity etc. The heavier gauges tend to last longer than the lighter ones simply because they are sturdier. Erecting a shade cloth structure is neither difficult nor expensive, and can be done using CCA-treated poles and galvanised wire to provide the frame, over which the netting is drawn, the individual (usually 3m wide) strips being sown together using a polyester twine. Rather than attempting to attach it to the poles and roof wiring (thereby increasing the risk of it tearing as it ages, the cloth is drawn over the structure to leave a generous portion at the bottom which is then pulled taut and buried in a trench around the outside of the structure. This will also ensure that the interior is protected from birds and large insects. Although conventional shade cloth will provide some protection from wind, special windbreak material is also available. Or, if your structure



A shade cloth structure. Image: Dicla Farm & Seed.

is in one of the colder windy areas, further protection can be added by incorporating something solid, such as corrugated iron, or even greenhouse plastic, to the windward

walls of the structure.

A shade cloth structure of a heavier gauge will provide some frost protection in the colder months, but will not

eliminate it entirely. So while your growing season is extended by a few weeks at both ends ~ you can start earlier in the spring and carry on longer in the autumn ~ the first real frost will kill tender plantings of beans, tomatoes, and the like.

You can continue, however, with winter veg such as root crops, brassicas, spinach, onions etc.

But the major advantage is in

ensuring a more benign climate through the growing season, with protection from sunburn, hail and heavy rain (the shade cloth disperses very heavy droplets into something much finer and less damaging.)

Greenhouses and tunnels

Before the invention of UV-stabilised polyethylene greenhouse sheeting greenhouses were constructed out

Continued on next page



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SHADE CLOTH & TUNNELS

Hobby greenhouses for your home

Although a smallholder with more space will probably opt for a bigger hobby greenhouse, Bell

& Paton Greenhouses of Honeydew sells a number of small, easily erected walk-in growing cupboards that will make an ideal gift for a green-

fingered aged parent recently moved to a retirement home, or an adult child embarking on first-time home ownership in a townhouse complex.

The smallest tiered Bell & Paton walk-in greenhouse measures 155cm deep by

Continued on page 22

GREENHOUSES

From previous page

of glass panes on a metal frame. Breakage from hail was, of course, a major problem in the highveld summer storms and elaborate arrangements of chicken wire stretched over the glass went some way to preventing this problem.

As transparent polycarbonate sheeting was developed this material was also used as greenhouse covering with great success, but at a cost which, compared to flexible plastic sheeting, has meant that it has largely fallen out of favour, at least for large installations.

Typically, modern greenhouses or tunnels comprise flexible sheeting drawn over a semi-circular frame made of aluminium, or painted or galvanised steel. Bent rather than straight material is used in the frame because the plastic tends to wear and tear when drawn over a rigid angular corner or edge. Also, a semi-circular profile ensures that the rays of the sun remain constant over the interior of the tunnel as it travels on its arc through the sky. This is also why tunnels in Gauteng are usually built with one end facing north and the other south.

The sheeting used is commonly a see-through or semi-transparent UV-stabilised

polyethylene, although Bell & Paton uses a polyethylene sheet into which a white loose-weave fabric is bonded for extra strength and life. For single tunnels the shape is fully semi-circular, or with a low flat vertical or slanted side. However, in situations where more than one tunnel is to be erected greater ground utilisation is achieved by building multi-span tunnels, the arches of the curved roof being supported internally by thin pillars. As with shadecloth structures a variety of cultivation methods can be used, ranging from bare earth, through containers, vertical planting arrangements, hydroponics, aeroponics and, again, aquaponics, combining fish farming in tanks and vegetables in beds to act as filters for the fish tank water.

Because of their closed nature plastic tunnels have their own set of problems to contend with, including an environment very friendly to the growth of fungi and viruses, excessive moisture, and excessive heat ~ at least during the day. For this reason one often sees tunnels with their ventilation flaps widely opened on hot days. Or, in more sophisticated installations, large cooling fans can be seen

running in the tunnels' ends to draw out the heat. Come nightfall, however, plastic sheeting only minimally retains heat, meaning that tender plants can

become affected on very cold nights. For this reason growers in the colder areas will use their tunnels intensively through the warmer months, and simply cease growing during the two or three coldest months in winter, using this time to effect repairs and renovations to their installations.

To continue growing year round requires artificial heating in the form of a greenhouse boiler, usually sited just outside the tunnel and connected to a series of

heating pipes running the length of the tunnel.

A lot of specialist equipment is available to make growing in tunnels easier, ranging from small tractors to fit within the tunnels' interior, powered cultivators for preparing beds, hand trolleys and barrows designed just wide enough that they can fit in the aisles between growing spaces, pots, buckets and bags for the plants themselves, plant support mechanisms for vine-like plants such as cucumber and tomato and, of course, irrigation systems. 🌱



Multispan tunnels under construction. Image: Spektrum Tunnels

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is a very real chance of mould, algae and fungus developing to ruin the crop. Too little moisture, particularly in the hot environment of a

greenhouse, and plants will be stressed at best, and dead at worst. And uneven water will result in some plants

Continued on next page

HOBBYISTS

From page 19

70cm wide and 200cm high. In its interior are mesh shelves on which plant pots are placed. The unit is specifically designed for the home gardener, making self-sufficient food propagation a pleasure. The smallest unit, which will fit easily on a patio, sells for less than R1 500, and comes in a kit for easy DIY erection. Bell & Paton also sell

larger hobby tunnels and full-size greenhouse tunnels for commercial production. All Bell & Paton greenhouses include framework made from 25mm galvanised steel poles, a UV treated, reinforced polyethylene covering roof to fit over poles, a dual zip roll up door for the smaller units or front and back doors on the bigger units, and roll up side windows with insect net for ventilation, an unusual enhancement not common in other tunnels constructions. So-called hobby tunnels, long shunned by the traditional commercial tunnel erectors as being not worth the effort, are becoming increasingly popular among a wide cross-section of homeowners and

smallholders. While they are too small to be commercially viable, hobby tunnels are large enough, if properly utilised, to grow just about everything a family will consume vegetable-wise, often with a gratifying surplus

for staff, friends etc.

Recognising this, a number of greenhouse specialists offer not only the tunnels themselves, but everything one needs to equip them, including growing containers, watering systems, seeds, growing mediums and, most critically, advice on how to get started. 🌱

For more information on tunnels, greenhouses and shade cloth:

Bell & Paton: 083 320 2922, Dicla Farm & Seeds: 011 662 1371,

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EASY WATER SOLUTIONS

IRRIGATION

From previous page

thriving and others being stunted.

Generally, therefore, the less free moisture and mist in the airnily is not suitable for a greenhouse. Delivery of water must rather be done with much more precision ~ and much less spray ~ than is achieved using a sprinkler system which, apart from quickly making a a green-house atmosphere conducive to the growth of mould etc will also lead to sodden aisles and puddles which will themselves become slippery and dangerous as algae and mould start to grow.

At the very basic end in a small set up one could simply go for hand-watering using hosepipes fitted with a rose. While cheap and simple this is labour-intensive and will also result in wet floors and uneven delivery. If one opts for a hydroponic or aeroponic growing system one's moisture and nutrient mixture is delivered in closed pipework, and any excess similarly removed in closed pipework, so the chance of spillage and moisture build-up is minimised.

Perhaps the ultimate form of water-wise delivery, certainly in extensive operations for bare earth plantings is through drip irrigation, and South Africa has some of the best drip-irrigation system

practitioners in the world, alongside those in Israel, another water-stressed country with extensive under-cover farming operations. Drip irrigation uses a light-weight plastic pipe fitted with a dripper (basically a hole of a certain precise diameter) every 30 or 60cm, which delivers a set amount (commonly one or two litres) of water or nutrient mixture under low pressure to each plant every hour.

A complete drip irrigation system incorporates a pump on a timer which feeds water and if necessary a nutrient solution from a reservoir through an adjustable mixer and filter into the pipe network, which is connected via a manifold which can be fitted with individual valves to switch the flow on or off to individual dripper lines. The pipework is easy to lift on and off the beds and if everything is aligned ~

seedlings and drippers ~ the plants receive their moisture directly to the area in which their roots are developing. In other words, no wet patches, no wastage and minimal chance of algae etc. And, of course, the piping etc, once correctly measured and positioned, can be used multiple times.

Although the materials and components used to set up a drip irrigation system are in

Continued on next page



Dripline irrigation in a field.
Image: Afriq Water

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Cleaning your chicken coop

Where there are chickens, there is chicken manure, and so your chicken coop will need regular cleaning. Even if they are free range during the day, in our "take away" society we need to house our chickens at night, so there will be an accumulation of droppings. How regularly the accommodation should be cleaned depends on the size of the coop, the number of chicken in your flock and also the material that you use for bedding.

Smallholders who want to prevent a rat problem clear away unfinished food at night time. Most owners will pick up droppings once a week and replenish the bedding. Some smallholders recommend cleaning the perches, nesting boxes and runs once a week. In that way, there will not be a build-up of manure and you can freshen up the bedding to prevent mould. The roosting bars quickly become caked with dried

droppings. A garden hoe or trowel is helpful in scraping this off. Then thoroughly wash down with a strong solution of vinegar and water.

If you have nesting boxes, take out the old bedding and quickly wipe out the boxes with a vinegar soaked cloth, before replacing the bedding with clean straw, wood shavings or peanut



Your chickens will produce manure.

husks. Cleaning the floor of the chicken run depends on

Continued on next page

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From previous page

themselves neither expensive or complicated the process of manufacturing the dripper line is complex as the drippers need to be inserted into the thin-walled pipe at precisely-predetermined intervals. For this reason much of the dripper line piping sold in South Africa is imported.

IRRIGATION

That changed radically late last year, however, when irrigation specialists Afriq Water of Taltron installed their own dripper line manufacturing plant, which now produces quality line at a fraction of the cost of imported equivalents. For more information: Afriq Water, 061 502 2547. 🌱

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From previous page
whether or not you use the deep litter method. You can simply pick up the droppings and rake the surface or sweep the floor if you have a concrete floor.

You might use this opportunity to sprinkle some diatomaceous earth on the floor, particularly where your chickens dust themselves. This helps to cut down on



Spraying down the elements of your coop will help keep it clean.

external parasites such as mites, but also internal parasites such as worms. Alternatively, you might wish to apply the deep litter method, where instead of scooping out the litter in the coop each week, you let the manure and bedding material accumulate inside. Simply cover your entire chicken coop in wood chips or whatever material you prefer. The waste will then compost underneath the top layer. Leave the chickens to scratch away for a couple of months. You will see when the wood chips are starting to vanish. Your ground will begin to look like really rich soil and less like a mulched area. About twice a year you need to undertake a deep cleaning of the coop. Take out the feeders and anything else that you can remove. Take out all the old bedding, as well as all of the dirt, feathers and droppings. Once again you

will need to scrape the manure off, as it does not soften with water.

Use a hose, or ~ even better ~ a pressure sprayer to spray the whole enclosure down. You might need to use a brush to scrub the walls and nesting boxes. Wipe all surfaces with the vinegar solution and allow everything to dry out completely. Scrub all the equipment such as water troughs and feeders and wipe with a vinegar solution. Allow everything to air dry, so that the smell of vinegar clears.

Lay down fresh bedding and replace the feeders. Remember that chicken manure is very watery, so choose bedding that is absorbent.



Choose a bedding that is absorbent.

When you are cleaning the chicken coop, check that there is nothing that needs to be repaired, such as wire mesh coming loose or nails sticking out of a wooden plank. Carry out your maintenance while you are busy in the coop, otherwise it might be forgotten. 🌿

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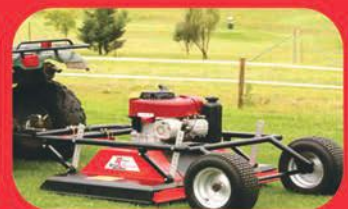


Above: Sturdy 300mm high load bin with rear-opening gates
Left: Raised, with 600mm sides

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TREES

An indigenous fruit tree with potential

A fruit tree native to southern Africa, *Mimusops zeyheri* Sond., commonly known as Transvaal red milkwood, could have potential as a food source, believe members of the faculty of Natural & Agricultural Sciences of North West University and other researchers.

According to Sanbi, this tree occurs across a wide range including the four northern provinces of South Africa, as well as Kwa-Zulu Natal, eSwatini and Mozambique. It



grows in a variety of natural conditions, from rocky outcrops and hillsides, to open, dry woodland, and in protected valleys of the Highveld areas and bushveld. It is tolerant of various soil conditions.

This leads admirers to believe that it is worth considering for more serious cultivation in summer rainfall areas, although it can only cope with moderate frost.

The red milkwood is a

medium to large evergreen tree with a rounded crown, which may reach up to 15m under ideal conditions.

The bark is grey to dark brown, while the leaves are glossy dark green, arranged spirally and carried on a spreading crown.

The trees give excellent shade if given enough space, so smallholders would do well to plant them in pastures to provide shade for livestock, as well as providing food for

birds and insects. A row of them would make a good windbreak when mature. Small, white, sweetly scented flowers are borne from October to February. The oval fruit is yellow-orange, 4,5cm long at maturity, with one or two seeds that are shiny. They ripen from April to September.

According to research, the fruit contains high concentrations of sucrose, glucose, and fructose. The orange colour is an indication of its high

Continued on next page

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The challenges of using agrichemicals

A webinar held in December last year and various recent articles have drawn the attention of the *Gauteng Smallholder* to the alarming state of the use of agricultural chemicals in South Africa. Most smallholders will have cause to use some or all of these chemicals on their plots:

- ☐ Pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides;
- ☐ Fertilizer;
- ☐ Acids;
- ☐ Caustic substances;
- ☐ Cleaning products;
- ☐ Paint;

- ☐ Fuel and lubricants, and,
- ☐ Solvents.

One of the causes for alarm is the fact that local health and environmental experts point out that as many as 67 agrichemicals which have been banned in Europe are legal for use in South Africa. The legal framework which regulates the use of chemicals in agriculture is based on the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Seeds & Remedies Act, No 36 of 1947, which no longer accommodates all the changes which have been made in chemical manufac-

turing in more than 70 years.

The application of the 14 pieces of agrichemical legislation is spread across seven different government departments, so the potential for confusion and lack of enforcement or co-ordination is enormous.

Labels on containers of these chemicals are often difficult to understand and they often lack information such as



buffer zones between application sites and housing for humans or animals, or what time should pass before workers can re-enter the treated area.

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TREES

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beta-carotene content. The seeds are recognised for their oil content, containing



Milkwood fruit.

calcium and phosphorus, organic matter and crude protein.

The medium fibre content of the seeds is useful for normal gastrointestinal motility in the diets of both humans and animals. The vitamin C content of the fruit is higher than that of exotic fruit such as guava.

Traditionally the fruit is used for making jelly, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

In traditional medicine various parts of the tree, seeds and fruit are used for the treatment of wounds and ulcers, inflammation, bleeding gums, sexually transmitted diseases and even tuberculosis.

The tree is thought to improve the soil, while the high tolerance to drought, salt, and resistance to root-knot nematodes are also important.

The academics recommended that the value chain of underutilised fruit trees and their domestication should be increased, as this could contribute to the livelihoods of smallholder farmers

through ensuring a steady supply of fruit, nutrients and associated products. 🌿



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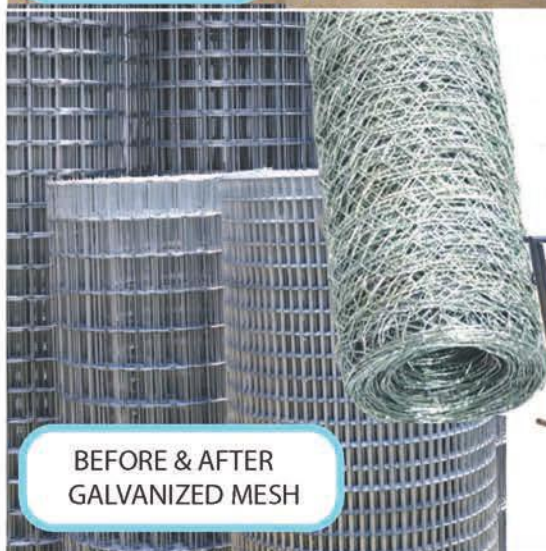
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From previous page

Of further concern is the fact that, should a smallholder want to find out more about any of these chemicals, the information is no longer on the website of the Dept of Agriculture.

It has been outsourced to Agri Intel, which is run by people who are manufacturers of agrichemicals and therefore could be construed as having a conflict of interest.

Furthermore, it is run on a user pays system, so you are

asked to fork out R1 000 or R1 800 registration fees, depending on the information that you require.

Research in the agricultural industry reveals that there is inadequate education and training of farm workers and often a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). So what can a smallholder do to address these challenges? Knowledge is our first weapon, so you can watch the webinar entitled

"#Unpoison our legislation" on YouTube.

Next smallholders could research Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programmes that are applicable to small farms and plots.

This entails close monitor-

ing of crops and vegetation and, where disease or insects arise, considering the least ecologically disruptive method of managing them.

The range of biological products available is increasing, along with information on other ways to manage pests and disease.

Smallholders must be aware of the benefits of not using toxic chemicals to human and animal health, as well as that of the land, air and water. Where one chooses to use chemicals one should carefully examine all the possible hazards involved, exercising scrupulous caution in the safe storage, mixing, application and disposal of the containers and unused liquids and powders.

Staff who use these chemicals



must be rigorously trained in where and how to mix them accurately, apply them safely, including the use of PPE, as well as how to wash themselves, their clothing and the equipment after use.

Adequate first aid training, materials and equipment are also important.

Family members and staff should also be trained in what to do in the case of an emergency involving chemicals, such as poisoning, explosion or fire.

Posters detailing the procedures and relevant emergency contact phone numbers should be displayed. ☘



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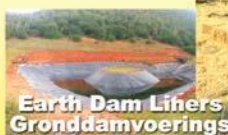
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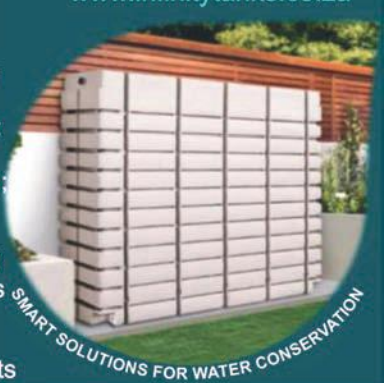
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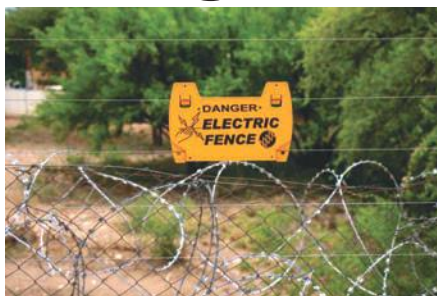
If you are looking to protect your property with an electric fence ~ a simple and cost effective way of preventing intruders ~ you must be mindful of the fact that this industry is regulated. In 2011 the Electrical Machinery Regulations within the Occupational health and Safety Act of 1983 were amended to better outline the

requirements for the installation of electric fencing. The Act requires that any

electric security fence system installed, repaired, re-strung, upgraded or extended after the 1st October 2012 must have a valid Electric Fence System certificate of compliance (EFC), issued by a registered Electric Fence System Installer (EFSI). This certificate can only be issued by a registered person who has been approved by the chief inspector and who has been issued with a Certificate of Registration.

Certificate validity

These certificates remain valid



until such time as you upgrade or repair your fence. Valid EFCs are trans-

ferred in a sale of property. If an electric fence was installed before 1 October 2012 and no EFC has been issued since, one will be required before sale of this property can be completed. An EFC will be issued based on the legislation that was applicable at the time the fence was installed and provided the electric fence has adequate earthing, the necessary warning signs and a compliant energiser. So if a smallholder wishes to erect an electric fence within the property, say around a

kraal to keep livestock contained, it will not be necessary to have a EFC for it, as long as it does not form a boundary on a public road. Some other things to take note of:

- ☐ Make sure that the energizer installed is certified and meets the standards set out in the SANS 60335-2-76

Continued on next page

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Quad bike tip-trailer makes light work of rubble

A powered tipping trailer with a 250kg load capacity, the latest invention by small implement and accessory manufacturer Quadmaster, will prove useful to builders, stable managers, nurserymen and smallholders alike.

The trailer's bin is 1,5m long, 900mm wide and has 300mm solid steel sides, to which a 300mm high cage can be added when handling voluminous bulk

products such as leaves, clippings, hay, as well as builder's rubble etc. The trailer is fitted with wide-profile turf tyres as standard and the tipping mechanism comprises a lever arm attached at the front, with the bin hinged to tip rearwards.

Activation of the lever arm is by a steel towing cable running through pulleys and drawn in by a 12V DC towing winch.

Power for the winch is usually supplied by the towing vehicle, eg a quad bike, but the trailer can be fitted with a 12V car battery for power if required.

The rear of the trailer is fitted with two gate doors which open on either side and fold back on to the trailer sides, leaving the entire rear clear so that no product is hooked into the trailer's corners as it discharges its load.



The trailer is tipped with power from the towing vehicle.

Activating the tipping mechanism can be done from the quad bike's seat if necessary (although the driver will need to alight to open and close the gates on the trailer unless an assistant is on hand). Manufacturer Quadmaster has dealers throughout South Africa, but for more information: Quadmaster, tel 033 330 6247. 🌱



FENCING

From previous page

standard document.

Make sure that it does actually have a valid certificate to verify this.

These are the internationally accepted safety standards that manufacturers must comply with.

This will cover the smallholder and will ensure that the energizer being used is safe.

Basic installation requirements

☐ If angle brackets will extend into neighbouring property, the neighbour's consent is required.

☐ The placement and positioning of brackets is important so if angled brackets are used, the maximum outward angle is 45 degrees; and they must be installed on the inside of the

boundary wall.

☐ Electric fencing on top of walls must be at least 1,5 m above ground level.

☐ The fencing must be installed and operate in such a way that it won't be hazardous or allow people or animals to become entangled in the wires.

☐ Barbed or razor wire cannot be electrified.

☐ Electric fences that are installed along public roads or pathways must be identified with compliant yellow warning signs at least 100 mm x 200 mm, which are also required at all gates and access points.

In urban areas, the spacing between the warning signs must not exceed 10m. 🌱

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Useful apps for the agriculturalist

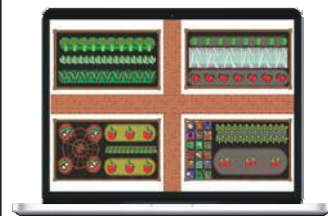
There are apps, it seems, for everything, including a few that will be helpful on a small-holding.

Agri Assistant is a multilingual information source for farmers and smallholders throughout southern Africa. Its features include:

- ☐ Reference material on agricultural products, including soil types, planting schedules, pest and disease control;
- ☐ Technical manuals for equipment such as irrigation control computers, vehicles, etc;
- ☐ Weather information including forecasts and live weather maps specific to your area;
- ☐ Farming organizations listed for each province;
- ☐ Agricultural news through a round-up of agrarian articles and videos;
- ☐ A service directory listing contact details for service providers relevant to farmers and smallholders.

The free app is available for Android or Apple via the Google and Apple app stores. The ARC Hub is another free online platform giving support to smallholders and commercial farmers in their day to day agricultural challenges.

Users can access information



Some examples of garden plans.
Image: Grow Veg

on crops, livestock, animal and plant health, as well as agro-processing. Training and extension services are also listed on the app. It is available on Android or Apple or at www.archub.agric.za. GrowVeg focusses on selecting and planting vegetables. The app's Garden

Planner helps you design the best layout for your vegetable garden. Whether you use traditional rows, containers, raised beds or square foot gardening, the Garden Planner gives you the flexibility to create the best design for your garden. You are also given advice on easy crop rotation, avoiding and dealing with pests or

depletion of nutrients in the soil. Subscribers receive email reminders of when to sow and plant out the vegetables in your plans.

Subscriptions are annual and the programme is available to use on your computer or laptop. You can sign up for a seven day free trial, at www.growveg.co.za. 🌱



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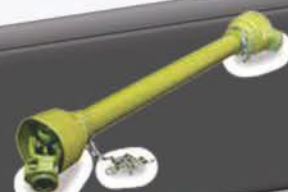


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If you follow on social media the campaigns by volunteer groups to clean Gauteng's streams, roadsides



Before and after a clean up day in March organised by Hennops Revival. You can volunteer to assist. Visit hennopsrevival.co.za for more info. Images: Hennops Revival

and rivers of rubbish you will know how disheartening it is to have to go back, week after week, to clean up fresh

accumulations of plastic, polystyrene and other human detritus.

For the problem reveals two ineluctible truths.

❑ The first is that the problem will never go away so long as people are careless with the disposal of their rubbish.

❑ The second is that a casual glance at any of the pictures of the clean-up campaigns will show that

"there's money in dem thar trash".

It is, frankly, doubly disheartening to see stuff that has value were it to be collected and taken to a recycling depot, such as plastic coldrink bottles, lying forlornly entangled with plastic bags, disposable nappies and other unmentionables that are only good for incineration or burial.

On the first point, the fact is that each and every household and consumer, however rich or poor, must buy in, intellectually and practically, to the idea of reducing the amount of plastic they use, and recycling as much of it as possible.

On the second point, one can make the observation that

the waste-pickers who scrabble through your garbage on dustbin day are doing South African communities a huge service and need support, not harassment. And so to help consumers ... households ... you ... to become more aware of the need to tackle the waste crisis we publish this month (and will continue to do so as space permits) a chart of the meaning of the various symbols printed on or embossed into plastic items, which will enable you to become more discerning about the packaging when choosing items in the shops, and more accurate in your efforts at recycling when it comes to waste disposal. 🌱

✂ CUT THIS OUT AND KEEP IT ON YOUR FRIDGE OR NEAR YOUR DUSTBINS

KNOW YOUR PLASTICS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
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PET

POLYETHYLENE TEREPHTHALETE

Soft drink bottles
Fruit juice bottles
Mineral water bottles
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HDPE

HIGH-DENSITY POLYETHYLENE

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Milk jugs
Yoghurt tubs
Butter & margarine tubs
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Washing & shower soap bottles



PVC

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Garden chairs
Pipes/fittings



LDPE

LOW-DENSITY POLYETHYLENE

Bread bags
Frozen food bags
6-pack plastic Sacks



PP

POLYPROPYLENE

Bottle caps
Straws
Medicine bottles



PS

POLYSTYRENE

Packing materials
CD cases
Fast food containers
Disposable cups and plates
Meat trays



OTHER

OTHER PLASTICS

Acrylic
Polycarbonate
Nylon
Fibreglass

IN SOUTH AFRICA YOU CAN RECYCLE THE FOLLOWING PLASTICS:



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HDPE



LDPE



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PS

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Raspberry canes. Easy growers, 1-2 plants per bag (small) R25 each collected. Call Pete on 072 587 9137.

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DIARY



ATTENTION CRAFT MARKETS, CLUBS ETC: If you would like details of your events included in the Diary, please fax or email your information to the Editor. For non-commercial enterprises this service is FREE.

SPECIAL NOTE: These dates are valid at the time of going press. Due to restrictions related to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, some dates and venues may change. We suggest you contact the organisers before the event.

Every Sunday

SA Lipizzaners weekly display at 11h00. SA Lipizzaner Centre, Dahlia Rd, Kyalami. Go to www.lipizzaners.co.za / call Lizelle on 079 716 4792 for details of special shows.

Cattle drive with City Slickers breakfast, Diamond X Cowboy Ranch, near Rayton. Call Rudan on 082 410 3180 / visit <http://www.diamondxrancho.co.za>, R500 per person.

Mnandi Methodist Church, 09:00, Mnandi Centre, cnr Tulip and Short Streets, Jen 083 709 3235 or Gail 072 477 0708, a small community who worship together. We have a Youth and Children's church.

Premier Mine Presbyterian Church, Lower Oak Ave, Cullinan. Garden of Remembrance (Columbarium), 079 060 9990 or 012 734 1640, Worship and Sunday school. Holy Communion for all on the 1st Sunday of every month.

Every Monday

Alcoholics Anonymous. 'Courage to Change' Group meeting, 19:30, NG Kerk, 8 Canadair Ave, Impala Park, Boksburg, call Warren 082 335 0049 or Tony 082 443 4425, if you want to drink – that's your problem! If you want to stop – that's our problem! No fees; no dues; just concerned fellowship.

April

2: Good Friday
3: Fun Walk/Run at Modderfontein

Dam. Nobs Fitness is raising money for the Crawl, Walk, Run Foundation, an NPO based in Tembisa. 07h00 – 09h30. Tickets are R80 for adults, R40 for kids. Book on quicket.co.za.

5: Easter Monday
12: New Moon

13-15: Basic Soil Properties, Soil Analysis & Interpretation of Results course at ARC, Arcadia. R4 025 per person, incl VAT and lunch. To book contact Adri Laas before 26 March. Tel 012 310-2518 / 082 445 6269. E-mail adril@arc.agric.za.

22: Earth Day

25: Painting in the Park 3 – No Mud, No Lotus, Pretoria Botanical Gardens. Class starts at 09h00 to 14h00. Painting materials included in the fee. Entrance to the park is separate. Contact Gideon Busquet-Craucamp on gideonslight@gmail.com.

27: Full Moon

27: Freedom Day

30: Arbor Day

May

11: New Moon

20: World Bee Day

26: Full Moon

June

5: World Environmental Day

5: Gauteng's annual Magical Medieval Fayre, La Vue Guest Lodge, Muldersdrift. Visit www.medievalfayre.co.za for more information.

10: New Moon

22-24: Africa Agri Tech 2021. Exploring Science and Technology in Agriculture. Time: 09h00–17h00.

Venue: Sun Arena, Time Square, Menlyn Maine, Pretoria. Cost:

Complimentary Trade Visitor Registration. Contact: Pula

Dippenaar at Africa Agri Tech (Pty) Ltd. +27 (0) 11 465 0099 or

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24: Full Moon



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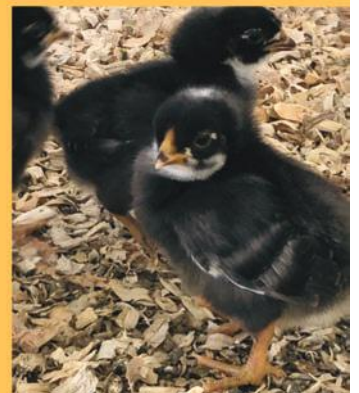
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When townies go rural

In the past two to three decades, I've noticed a trend. Plots that were once those closest to the more developed suburbs are now becoming housing estates and townhouse complexes. The upside ~ or not ~ being that some of these complexes are surrounded by still-working smallholdings.

An acquaintance recently downsized from a plot into one of these complexes. With smallholdings on all three sides of the townhouse complex, the estate agent took much pleasure in selling her "your country-home paradise" ~ more accurately just a block of flats in the middle of what used to be a sylvan semi-rural area (itself destined to become a building site as more complexes are built).

And often the complexes have risibly kitsch names that involve woods, brooks or ~ a personal favourite of mine ~ badly translated Italian (think Monte Casino which, OK, is not a housing complex but still a stupidly named faux-Tuscan gambling den) or French names that no one can pronounce and that have absolutely nothing to do with the history or geography of the area. For example, the "creek" theme used in the naming of a series of complexes in what was Benoni North Agricultural Holdings seems a stretch, considering the nearest body of moving water is about 4 kilometres away. The many Villa Blancas, and iterations thereof, also seem a little silly when the body corporate then votes to paint them grey.

But townies flock to these apartments in their hundreds. The problem with this is that townies, in great ignorance, move to the "country" and struggle with the adjustment.

For my acquaintance the first issue came around not long after she moved, when the smallholders left in the area began their annual grass cutting. In this suburb there are two or three smallholders who own tractors and spend much of March and April travelling plot to plot, cutting the grass for a fee.

Unfortunately for the townies, this meant that the tractors had to, heaven forbid, travel on the road. The complex WhatsApp group was abuzz with messages lamenting the times in the morning when one might get stuck behind a 1953 Vaaljapie on its way to its next job (not that they'd know the difference between a Vaaljapie, a Bloubottel or a John Deerie).

"Surely they're not allowed on the road? They're so slow," said one message. "Sometimes they even pull those big grass thingies and that makes them even slower," another genius pointed out. Who knows what the "big grass thingie" was.

And then, as soon as the tractors had appeared, cutting season

was over and the tractors went back to their sheds, ready to reappear again this year.

With the good rains this year many more smallholders will be requesting the services of Oom Kobus and his grass cutter, and the ensuing complaints of Vaaljapie traffic jams will block up the WhatsApp group once again.

In another instance, the complex WhatsApp group started buzzing in the middle of the night. Someone had heard noises coming from outside their unit, they were too afraid to go outside and check for themselves, so please could the resident security guard go and check for them. Of course, this being South Africa, this rightly sent a panic through the complex, the text group lighting up with speculation about the "dodgy" looking characters who have been seen around the complex in the last few days.

Five minutes later, the security guard reported back: "I have been to scene and assessed the area. I saw no imminent threat except for a horse in the neighbour's property grazing alongside the fence." Unsurprisingly, there was not much group chatter after that. Finally, just in time for Christmas came this exchange. "Can anyone hear that funny noise? Is it a car struggling to start?" "Yes I hear it, it goes off every few minutes, maybe it's an alarm of some kind?" Speculation continued for half an hour: what could the strange noise be?

You and I, understanding the general theme of noises in the country, could imagine perhaps it was a wood chipper, or a chainsaw, a borehole being drilled or even Oom Kobus overhauling his Vaaljapie.

But no. The noise confounding the townies for a solid 30 minutes one December afternoon was the noise of a solitary donkey mournfully braying in the distance.

My ex-smallholder friend, in her newly-bought, stupidly-named, two-bed, two-bath simplex with neighbours who don't know that tractors are allowed on public roads, could relate to the donkey's loneliness.



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