

SOUTH AFRICAN SMALLHOLDER

MARCH 2022

EVERYTHING A SMALL FARMER NEEDS

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What to plant in autumn
Growing nasturtiums
...and much more!**

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Front Cover

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FEATURES

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An obsolete law



Among all the arson, looting and killing that occurred in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng last year, by far the worst incident to occur – and certainly the one with the most long-lasting effect – was the torching of a large, new chemical warehouse north of the Durban CBD.

That incident brought to light a number of points as to the whys and wherefores of the mayhem. Firstly, this was not a random attack by hooligans. Why, after all, take the trouble to breach a security fence and set fire to a building filled with stuff that you can't pinch and use, or at least sell? Particularly when there were plenty of other warehouses, malls and shops in close proximity filled with enticing furniture, electronics, foodstuffs, and clothing, etc that are much more pinchable, usable and fenceable.

Secondly, the environmental damage caused by the fire was immense, and will continue to be suffered for years, if not decades, to come. Apart from the air pollution, the human cost of which will not become apparent until residents of the area to the north of the fire start to present with lung ailments, tumours and more, run-off from the fire killed the lower reaches of the Umngeni River, and caused the closure of Durban's northern beaches for weeks afterwards.

The toll on marine life in the region is immeasurable.

It has now also come to light that the warehouse itself, while newly-constructed, may never have been intended for the storage of hazardous material, in that it may have lacked the necessary disaster

mitigation measures, such as perimeter bunding, for the classes of chemicals contained inside. But above all, the fire unearthed an uncomfortable truth. Many of the chemicals stored, and destroyed, in that warehouse were compounds intended for use as, or as ingredients for the manufacture of, pesticides and herbicides. And in either case they have been declared to be so toxic and hazardous that their use is banned outright in many countries around the world. But not in South Africa.

How can this be? Firstly, because our regulators and lawmakers are glacially slow in making necessary changes to the laws and regulations. But also because the Act that regulates the importation, manufacture and use of agricultural remedies, both veterinary and horticultural, was originally promulgated three quarters of a century ago, in 1947!

While the law has been amended on a number of occasions in the intervening years, it is surely time for a complete revamp and overhaul, firstly because the original Act and numerous amendments makes the whole thing difficult to interpret and understand clearly, and therefore difficult to apply and enforce. But it should also be relooked in its entirety to make it align with modern sentiments, practices and concerns, especially in a time of greatly increased pressure on the Earth's natural resources and concerns about environmental degradation and destruction.

Pete Bower
Editor

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Plastic recycling not as easy as it looks

Sir ~ Since reading the articles in the SA *Smallholder* on recycling, our household has been more careful to separate and recycle our waste. Tins, bottles and glass and polystyrene go one way, paper and cardboard another and aluminium foil is fashioned into an every-growing ball to go with aluminium cans.

But plastic bags are another issue entirely. While we keep them separate for later sorting I have noticed the sad reality that many plastic bags are made from compounds that are not recyclable, or are "not currently recycled", presumably because of cost. In many cases these non-recyclable bags could, in my layman's opinion, easily be replaced by recyclable alternatives.

Another thing one notices when taking the recycling

trend seriously, is that products are often sold with multiple types of components to their packaging. For example, a milk bottle is made of one material, the screw top closure of another and the label of yet another. Not all of these are necessarily recyclable. Perhaps it's time that we consumers starting exerting pressure on manufacturers to use only recyclable packaging. We could do this by examining the backs of products when we buy them, and choose alternatives that are more appropriately packaged. The manufacturers would soon change their packaging when they saw their sales volumes dropping. Or, better still, we could buy only products with no packaging at all.

George Antrobus

Howick

RAINFALL

Is this the wettest summer we've ever had?

If East Gauteng (Bredell, near Kempton Park to be exact) receives nothing more than a few good showers of rain in the remainder of the rainy season, the seasonal year from September 2021 to August 2022 could be the wettest the region has enjoyed in the last two decades.

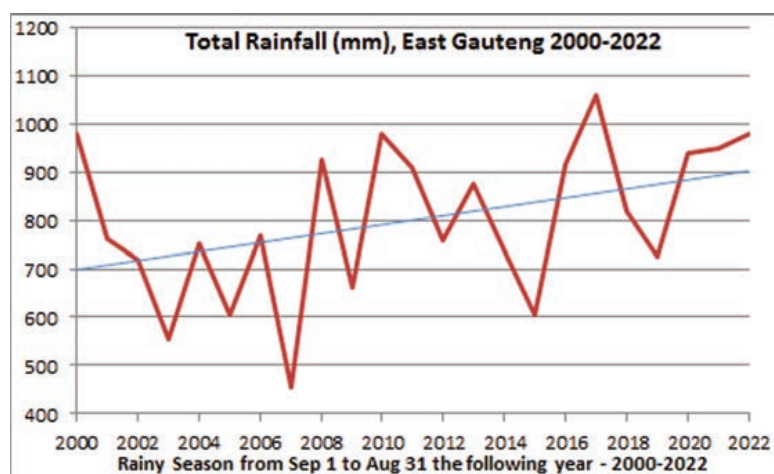
To the last week of February we had already measured 979mm of rain this season, which makes it the second wettest since 2000 (after 2017 at 1 058mm and just more than 2000 itself at 978mm).

And rain continues to fall in March and April, as well as a little usually in May, so to receive the 84mm more that is needed to top the wet 2017 season is entirely possible.

Another interesting observation is that in the seven years from 2016 no fewer than five have offered up total rainfall of more than 900mm.

By contrast, in the earlier years from 2001 to 2015, figures above 900mm were the exception rather than the rule.

That our summers are becoming wetter is borne out



by the trendline on the accompanying graph, which shows that the rolling average of our rainfall has increased by no less than 200mm in that time.

Also interesting is the observation that the nature of our rain showers has changed over the years, with individual showers becoming shorter and sharper, and more localised.

And this year, happily, we have experienced no hailstorms to speak of. ☀

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EVENTS

Dinokeng Voluntary Rangers Fundraiser: Cook and win

The Dinokeng Game Reserve's Voluntary Rangers are hosting their annual fundraising event in the form of a cooking competition ~ Cooking on Coals.

Join the rangers on Saturday, 30 April at the Lazy River Bush Pub in Dinokeng for a day of fun, all for a good cause.

The competition will be judged by celebrity judges Chris Forrest and the Braai Boy. Entry into the competition is R300 per team of two. Want to show off your cooking skills? Visit

www.dinokengvr.co.za/events to enter your team.

There will also be a market, kids' playground and live entertainment provided by Heuning.

Entrance to the event is R50. Children under 12 enter free of charge.

Dinokeng Game Reserve is one of South Africa's best kept secrets. Just 30 minutes from Pretoria and just over an hour from Johannesburg, Dinokeng is Gauteng's only Big Five reserve.

The Dinokeng Voluntary Rangers are involved with major projects in the park such as assisting with anti-poaching, snare removals, community conservation lessons and the oversight of visitors to the park. And,

they assist in invasive plant and tree removal.

The rangers also present bush orientation courses, snake handling, and courses on many more topics. Dinokeng Voluntary Rangers also participate throughout the year in community upliftment projects, such as giving orphaned children a weekend in the bush, complete with conservation talks and a game drive.

If you are interested in hosting a stall or pop-up show on the day, visit www.dinokengvr.co.za/events to complete the application process. 🌿

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New smallholder register sheds light

To “understand its client base both in terms of size and scale of operation” the Dept of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural

Development (Dalrrd) has compiled a register of South Africa's farmers.

The exercise was started in 2019/20, when Statistics South Africa released the Agricultural Census, which covered mainly the commercial farming sector.

Says minister Thoko Didiza, “While this was encouraging, we were still short of data about smallholder producers in our country. The aim of the (latest) survey was to get data that will tell us where the smallholders are, their demographics, production and their contribution to employment.”

To ensure that this work meets the statistical requirements necessary, the department had to work with Stats SA on the development of the model.

The national department also had to work with the provincial departments of agriculture, “because this is where, on a daily basis, farmers receive their services.”

“In 2020, we had 95 501 registered farmers in our

register, ...delineated in terms of provinces. One interesting feature is that in some provinces there are more female producers.”

In terms of age category, the department found that during the year 2020, KwaZulu-Natal had more young farmers, followed by the Eastern Cape.

With regard to operation or farmers' production, the register has confirmed that more smallholder and subsistence farmers are involved in livestock production, followed by crops and mixed farming.

The farmer register covers active, reachable smallholder farmers across provinces and while not all farmers were reached in this phase of the register, due to Covid lockdown restrictions, farmer registration is ongoing, as the department is still attracting more farmers to its database in all the provinces.

The data collected to some extent includes households, subsistence, medium-scale and commercial farmers, based on farming activities such as cultivation of crops and horticulture, livestock production and mixed farming. 🌸

Livestock shipper Al Mawashi pulls out of SA

Kuwaiti animal trader Al Mawashi, operator of a number of ageing livestock carriers, will no longer buy South African sheep for live shipment to the Middle East. Rather, it will focus its purchases on Australia.

This, says Al Mawashi in a statement, is as a result of South African stakeholders in the animal trade, including Transnet, the meat industry and the Dept of Agriculture “dragging their feet” in drawing up guidelines for the shipment of live animals by sea.

Al Mawashi added that it had lost R49 million directly as a result of the National SPCA's relentless oversight of the various consignments of animals for shipment, both at the company's Berlin feedlot, and on the quayside and aboard ship at the port of East London, not to mention the costs of fighting high court appli-

cations brought by the NSPCA to have the practice stopped.

In a statement heralding the departure of Al Mawashi the NSPCA vows to continue with its high court application to have the live transportation of South African animals by sea outlawed completely, and certainly not north of the equator. 🌸

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ARC's new soil test to help growers

A new service package from the ARC-Plant Health & Protection (ARC-PHP) and ARC-Natural Resources and Engineering-Soil, Climate & Water Research campuses named YourSoil™ offers a comprehensive analytical service to farmers and land users to determine the health of their soils.

The testing package, discounted by 10% on normal tariffs until the end of March, gives farmers the opportunity to test their soil health throughout the year, aligned to the various crop development stages. Soil health is defined as the ability of the soil to function as a life supporting system that promotes agricultural productivity as well as improved water and air quality.

Improving the health of a farmer's soil can reduce input costs and enhance its sustainability. Moreover, with an understanding of the composition and characteristics of one's soil, such as minerals, pH etc, one can ensure the best possible growing medium for one's plants.

Says the ARC, "In light of the increasing importance of soil health to farmers, the benefits of this unique new package are endless.

The customized set of tests can contribute towards a long-term soil monitoring system, which can result in more income on a sustainable basis."

The YourSoil™ service includes a list of tests that covers two broad aspects of soil.

The first is the biotic aspect, where soil microorganisms, nematodes, fungi and bacteria are used as biological indicators to determine soil health.

The second is the abiotic aspect, which includes the physical and chemical analysis of the soil and plant material.

The package can then be tailor-made as individual farmers have the opportunity to choose from a wide

range of tests within these two aspects.

All these tests focus on soil as a natural resource and its sustainable use and management in agriculture.

A list of tests included in this package and a detailed description of each test is available on request.

Farmers collect representative samples from their land (normally one sample per hectare) and send it to ARC-PHP with a submission form (provided to the farmer on request) indicating the tests selected and background information of the soil sample.

Samples are then processed by the respective units and a detailed report is compiled by experts, to indicate to the farmer which area of soil health status needs attention.

One of the unique aspects is that there is one quotation and one report per farmer, which eases the process. There is also an ask-the-expert section where the results from each of the tests selected are assessed by experts and based on the results, recommendations of fertilisers, crop rotation, integrated pest management systems etc are given.

For more details on the tests, how to sample and general enquiries contact Dr Chantelle Girgan on yoursoil@arc.agric.za or phone 012 808 8266. 🌱



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SMART SMALLHOLDERS

Passion drives this Brits ostrich farmer

Brits smallholder Kabelo Lekalakala has found an interesting way to sustain his passion for raising ostriches. He sources up to 80 very young chicks in the Western Cape and cares for them on his 5ha smallholding, Pitso Ostrich Farm, near Brits in North West.

When they are a month old he sells them at R7 000 for ten chicks. He has clients in Limpopo, Gauteng and North West.

"It's important to mentor aspiring farmers, as there is a lot to learn about keeping ostriches," he comments. He has a mentor in Oudsthoorn.

Once someone places an order, Lekalakala keeps them informed about the progress of the chicks. "In my virtual mentorship I explain about the lighting to keep the chicks warm, the feeding, the ventilation, vaccinations and when they can go outside, so that when they come to collect their chicks they are ready for the task.



Adult birds at Pitso Ostrich Farm.

"I try to prevent them being overwhelmed. I also have to prepare them for mortalities."

He promotes his products through social media. "I post on Facebook and Instagram."

He started back in 2019 and tried to keep a small flock of chicks in his backyard in his village, where he used to keep chickens.

He soon discovered that these big birds need proper facilities.

He has been seeking support from the North West Dept of Agriculture, but has not been successful yet.



Kabelo Lekalakala of Pitso Ostrich Farm, Brits.

He had to sell his car to get a home loan from a bank to buy the smallholding, which is 8kms from Brits.

"Fortunately, the previous owner had also kept ostriches and had set up eight breeding camps. In addition, he had planted Rhodes grass and lucerne, which is a big help in feeding the ostriches."

Lekalakala was only able to keep one breeding pair from his original flock, as the cost of feeding and caring for the birds is high. "I have to buy yellow maize and pellets to supplement the grazing."

At present he has ten four month old chicks.

He feels strongly about educating the community about the value of ostrich meat.

He sings the praises about how healthy the meat is, but says that local people don't think of buying it.

"Sadly it's a first world export product. We are global leaders, providing 75% of ostrich meat internationally. Yet our domestic consumption is so low. We need to ignite an interest in eating the meat."

When he left school he studied entrepreneurship and at present works as a business advisor.

He acknowledges that his plot is too small to run a commercial enterprise.

However he has plans to develop his ostrich farm as part of the tourism options in the area.

His smallholding is sandwiched between two game



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SMART SMALLHOLDERS

lodges, so there is already traffic. He is trying to work with the Madibeng municipality to draw visitors to the region.

His long-term goal is to expand his hatchery and establish a restaurant. "Tourists can come and learn all about ostriches."

Lekalakala cannot afford any assistants. From time to



Young ostriches at Pitso Ostrich farm.

time students who need experiential learning come and work with him.

He is deeply disappointed in the lack of government support.

"Growing up in Bapong Village, I always wanted to be a farmer, but not like every other farmer. I was looking for a niche agricultural brand." He discovered it when his work in the SME development sector took him to Oudsthoorn. He encountered emerging farmers in the ostrich industry and he developed his fascination for ostriches.

He decided there was an opportunity for him back in North West.

"It's passion that keeps me going. In this work you need a lot of patience and hard work. Sometimes you don't feel like carrying on, but then you tell yourself you've come this far and you must persevere."

He is planning an event on his plot on 30 April, in the form of a two-course dinner and wine pairing, where guests will have an ostrich meat tasting and will get information about these wonderful birds.

To learn more about Pitso Ostrich Farm or to book for this event email pitsoostrichfarm@gmail.com or call Lekalakala on 073 621 1584. 🌿

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LIVESTOCK

How to transport livestock

When buying or selling livestock, a small-holder must consider how to transport the animals. Proper transport will mean your animals arrive with as little stress as possible, both for you and the animals themselves.

Severe stress can lead to a loss of condition, illness and in extreme cases even death. So anyone who has spent money on an animal must take measures to avoid stress and injury.

The Livestock Welfare Coordinating Committee (LWCC) of SA has drawn up a code of best practice for the transport of animals which can be used as a guide.

Basics

Animals should be handled gently and firmly. Never pull livestock by their fur or wool. This is the same as pulling a person by the hair and causes bruising. Also, never pull an animal by their horns, if they have them. Horns are sensitive and can break.

Do not drag animals by ropes around their necks.

Animals should not be lifted or carried by their heads, ears or tails.

Ensure the animals to be transported have been separated away from the herd or flock before you begin the process. You can encourage them towards their separation pen by using sticks with canvas or belting straps to hit the ground next to the animal, and not the animal itself.

For some species using a crush will help funnel the animals towards the vehicle.

Paperwork

Before you set about the process of loading, you must ensure you have the correct paperwork to have animals on the road. The buyer needs to get a Certificate of Removal from the seller, along with a Stock Identification form and your receipts of purchase, so that you can prove that the animals have not been stolen. Both these documents are available for download at www.sasmallholder.co.za/resources under the Livestock section.

If you are selling, prepare the forms beforehand. If you are buying, it makes sense to download the forms beforehand, in case the seller does not have them.

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LIVESTOCK

Vehicle

There are some basic standards for the vehicle you use to transport livestock.

Ensure the vehicle has a non-slip floor and is solid, ie there are no holes in it that an animal can get its foot caught in. Your vehicle must also have proper drainage.

Adequate ventilation and light is crucial, especially over long distances. Make sure there are no sharp edges, corners or spikes in the vehicle.

Your vehicle or trailer must have sidewalls high enough to prevent the animal from escaping or falling out. Because of the regulations of space, a bakkie will only be suitable for a small number of small livestock. The industry standard recommends that your vehicle is large enough to allow an animal to turn around in. Do not move a sheep or goat in the boot of a car, as there is no ventilation.

The Livestock Welfare Coordinating Committee (LWCC) suggests the following calculations for floor space required:

- ☐ 1.4 m² per each adult bovine;
- ☐ 0.3 m² per calf;
- ☐ 0.4 m² per sheep or goat
- ☐ 0.8 m² per adult pig.

When transporting pigs, you must ensure shade covering of some sort for journeys longer than an hour. Avoid all exposure to direct sunlight. Carry water with you for emergencies, or should you need to spray the animals to reduce heat exhaustion.

Loading and offloading

Avoid mixed-species transport. Do not transport the young of one species with adults of another. Do not transport horned animals with non-horned animals, especially in the case of cattle.

Diseased, injured, or animals in poor condition should not be transported unless to seek medical care or for the purposes of humane euthanasia.



Your trailer and loading ramp must have a non-slip floor surface. This one does not.

Pregnant animals are particularly susceptible to stress. It is not advisable to transport an animal that is in its last trimester of pregnancy. Lactating animals should be milked before you load them onto the vehicle. Unweaned young should not be transported with their mother.

Do not load in rain, extreme cold or extreme heat. If transporting in winter, you must also factor in the effect of wind chill, especially in open-sided vehicles. In winter, do not transport your animals if they are wet.

It is preferable to load your animals with the use of a ramp. This must be non-slip and sturdy and at an adequate angle for walking. The LWCC recommends a 30° angle for sheep and goats, 25° for cattle and 20° for pigs. Your ramp should be fitted to the exact height of the vehicle - animals should not need to step up into the vehicle off a ramp. If your vehicle and loading procedures are adequate, you should not need to restrain the animal once loaded. However, if the animal is a danger to itself or others you may restrain it to prevent injury. Do not use baling twine or wire to restrain an animal. Do not use a slipknot as this can cause strangulation. The rope should be long

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enough to allow the animal to stand in a natural position with its head upright.

Your journey must start as soon as possible after you have finished loading. Do not let the animals stand around in the vehicle unnecessarily. Inspect the animals regularly during long journeys. This should happen at least every two hours. Do not stop for more than 30 minutes and make sure you have parked on level ground in shade and in a quiet area. Livestock should not be on the road for more than 18 hours. If this happens, you should offload the animals in a safe area with suitable feed, water and shade.



Trailers for pigs must have shade.

If an emergency occurs such as a breakdown of your vehicle, contact the SAPS as well as the closest animal welfare organisation (SPCA, etc) for assistance. Once you have arrived at your destination, do not use excessive force to offload. Ensure that you have help for offloading. Again, your offloading ramp must have non-slip flooring. Offload directly into a pen or kraal that has sufficient water and access to shade. This will allow the animals to de-stress from their journey. Inspect each animal in the kraal for injuries ~ this includes examining their eyes, nose and mouth for injuries or excessive frothing, mucus etc.

Keep dogs inside, unless they are trained sheepdogs, as they are not likely to help the proceedings. Ensure that there is water at hand.

Inter-provincial travel

Along with the national guidelines and legal requirements for stock removal, you must ensure you are within provincial guidelines.

Before your journey, check if there are any restrictions currently in place. In cases of disease outbreak (eg, foot and mouth, swine flu, African horse sickness) provincial governments restrict the movement of animals between them to prevent the spread of disease. 🌿

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EQUINES

Tips on towing a horsebox

Practical advice from a retired SA Pony Club regional chairman

It is extraordinarily easy to turn an otherwise placid and tractible horse or pony into a thoroughly unpleasant box-shy monster that is difficult if not impossible to load into a horsebox, and thus which becomes, from a competition point of view, very much less desirable as a mount for yourself or your offspring.

Here are some tips to horse boxes, boxing and travelling that may prevent this from happening.

It goes without saying that the box itself should be mechanically sound and up to the task.

In this respect the tyres should be regularly checked, not only for pressure and wear, but for flat spots and perishing if the box spends much of its time standing in the sun unused.

A regular check by a professional of the condition of the floor is most important, because a rotten wooden floor will easily give way to a stomping hoof of a heavy horse, and a horse whose hoof breaks through the floor will in all likelihood be injured so badly as to require euthanasia.

At the very least a horsebox will be fitted with an inertia brake system and it goes without saying that these should be regularly checked, as should the lights, indicators etc. And the towing hitch. Is the safety chain in place and undamaged?

Boxes, of course, can vary in dimensions, and one that can carry a couple of ponies might well not be large enough for two big hunters.

The interior walls and ceiling of the box are also important. Sometimes, owners like to cover the walls and ceiling with a sound-deadening or insulating material such as carpeting. If this is your desire, make sure you use a light coloured carpet. In fact, keep the interior of the box as light as possible.

If nothing else this will help in loading because no animal (or human for that matter) likes to enter a small, dark space ~ at least not without allowing the eyes to adjust to the gloom beforehand.

When loaded the floor of the box should be as level as possible, which is achieved by ensuring that the tow hitch of the box and of the towing vehicle are at the same height.

It goes without saying that to tow a horsebox requires

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EQUINES

a towing vehicle of sufficient power and size. Very few sedan cars, therefore, are suitable for the task (and none will be fitted with the necessary mechanisms if expected to tow a hydraulically-braked trailer). And even if the vehicle itself is suitably powerful, the tow hitch itself may not be suitably robust to safely tow a laden horse box.

With the trailer attached to the towing vehicle, and the lights connected and checked, now's the time to start loading, which will probably be early in the morning as you head off to a competition.

First, if you can, position the rig so that the sun is behind you.

This will ensure maximum light enters the trailer, thereby lightening it (see above).

Do the same when loading to come home in the late afternoon.

Although experienced horsemen, with animals they know and trust, may be able to load their mounts by themselves, for a beginner it's a minimum of a three-man job ~ one to lead the horse up the ramp and into the box, and two to ensure that it keeps moving forward, and most importantly that it doesn't swing its rear to the left or right, thereby allowing its feet to slip off the ramp.

Having said that it's a three-man job, it shouldn't be a show-and-tell for the whole family because the



Two-berth horse box.

exercise is far more likely to descend into farce, or disaster, if a gallery of onlookers assembles and begins offering "helpful" advice from the sidelines. The advice is often not helpful. And dogs are better locked indoors when loading horses.



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EQUINES

Generally, the shallower the slope of the ramp the better.

The larger horse should always be loaded on the right of a two-berth box.

Never tether the horse in the box, and remember that it is illegal to allow a groom (or, worse, a child) to travel in a box along with the horses.

When unloading the horse it is wise to fasten an extra-long lead rein to the horse's halter beforehand (a lunge rein will do). This, in case the horse scampers down the ramp, looks around at its new surroundings and decides to take a celebratory exploratory canter around the place. A longer rein gives you a better chance of hanging on and bringing its antics to a stop.

While how one loads and unloads horses is important, no less important is how one tows. If in doubt, hitch up your box, climb into it, and stand where your horses will stand, without hanging on with your hands, while somebody else tows you around your neighbourhood. You will find yourself being thrown

backwards when the driver pulls away, and from side to side when cornering, and forward when braking. You, at least, have the intellectual capacity to anticipate what's happening and compensate to some degree ~ your horse doesn't.

So, to better experience what your horse experiences, reduce your compensatory ability by putting on a blindfold first.

You will need to do this only once to become a much better tow vehicle driver, the basics of which are slow, steady pull-offs, very gentle cornering, leaving plenty of following distance ~ two or three times what you would normally leave ~ and very slow and gentle braking.

And, generally, at a travelling speed that enables you to safely anticipate any hazard or situation that other idiots on the road may throw at you.

It goes without saying that you should anticipate a journey time of two to three times as long as a normal trip to the same destination would take.

Tally ho! 🌸

TRACTORS

Two wheel tractors: Cheaper alternative for tillage

Two wheel tractors, also known as walking tractors or walk-behind tractors, provide cheap, reliable power to plough fields and vegetable patches, drive generators, threshing machines and water pumps, and even convert to handy rural people-carriers.

Usually Chinese-made, their diesel engines can be 12 or 15 HP matched to six or eight speed gearboxes. In top gear they can be dangerously fast! They have been available in South Africa for well over 25 years, and second-hand machines are now to be found at auctions and tractor dealerships.

Being so basic, there is very little that can go wrong with them. The engine (often without even electric start) has, literally, only a handful of moving parts.

They do require some skill to operate, otherwise they can be lethal.

And while they can do all the things a conventional tractor can do ~ rip, plough, rotavate, cut, rake and

haul trailers ~ each operation requires a specially designed implement. There is a large range available, including planters and harvesters for various crops, ploughs, ridgers, lawn mowers, water pumps, and ride-on trailers.

Two-wheelers can be used as walk-behinds or ride-ons, the choice depending on the use and the buyer. Again, the change from walk-behind to ride-on entails no more than hitching a wheeled driver's seat to the engine bit. In the case of trailers (for goods or people) the driver's seat and the trailer are usually combined.

In light soils on smallholdings or small farms they are ideal, getting the job of cultivating done just as effectively as a four-wheel machine.

But, not unnaturally, each implement is an add-on, and an add-on cost. So while the tractor (engine, gearbox and drive wheels) may appear cheap, the implements can double the total cost. 🌸



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Beat the autumn blues with these veg

If you're not vigilant, autumn on a smallholding can get you down. With the arrival of cooler weather and shortening days, the super-energetic have a tendency to think that life as they know it has come to an end and won't return until next spring (and that's months away).

Slackers, on the other hand, depressed that their dreamed-of garden never got off the ground, tell themselves they've failed (again).

But there is another way of looking at this situation: to see autumn as a challenge. Yes, there is still time to sow seed, and to get that veggie plot up and running, even in the coolest spots. In fact, with some crafty choices, the hitherto gardenless will even be able to impress family and neighbours.

Radishes are the most rewarding vegetable to grow, because they come up so quickly. (That's why they are the ideal seed to give your young kids to sow, thereby hopefully instilling a lifelong love of gardening.) Now is a good time to plant them because they prefer cool weather. You can grow them in almost any soil, but they thrive in soil that has been improved with organic material. You plant the seeds

directly (no need for seed trays and transplanting). Prepare the bed to a fine tilth, breaking up all clods. Plant the seeds in a shallow groove and cover with 1-1.5cm of fine soil, leaving 12-15cm between rows. To ensure continuity don't sow them all at once, rather sow a few every two to three weeks.

Because they are so easy to grow, it's worth experimenting with different cultivars of radishes, including those of different shapes and colours. Generally speaking the smaller (and younger) the radish the hotter it is. They lose their flavour and become floury if you leave them to become big.

From the same family, you might consider growing Daikon or Japanese radish. This is a long white radish, milder flavour than the small round or oval radishes. They should be planted in similar conditions to the ordinary radishes, but they grow well in deep soil and must be watered regularly.

The best flavour seems to be when they are about the size of a carrot and they can be stored in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks if washed and dried and the leaves cut off. The leaves, by the way will be a treat for poultry or livestock.

Daikon radish can be eaten simmered, stir fried,



Red radish.



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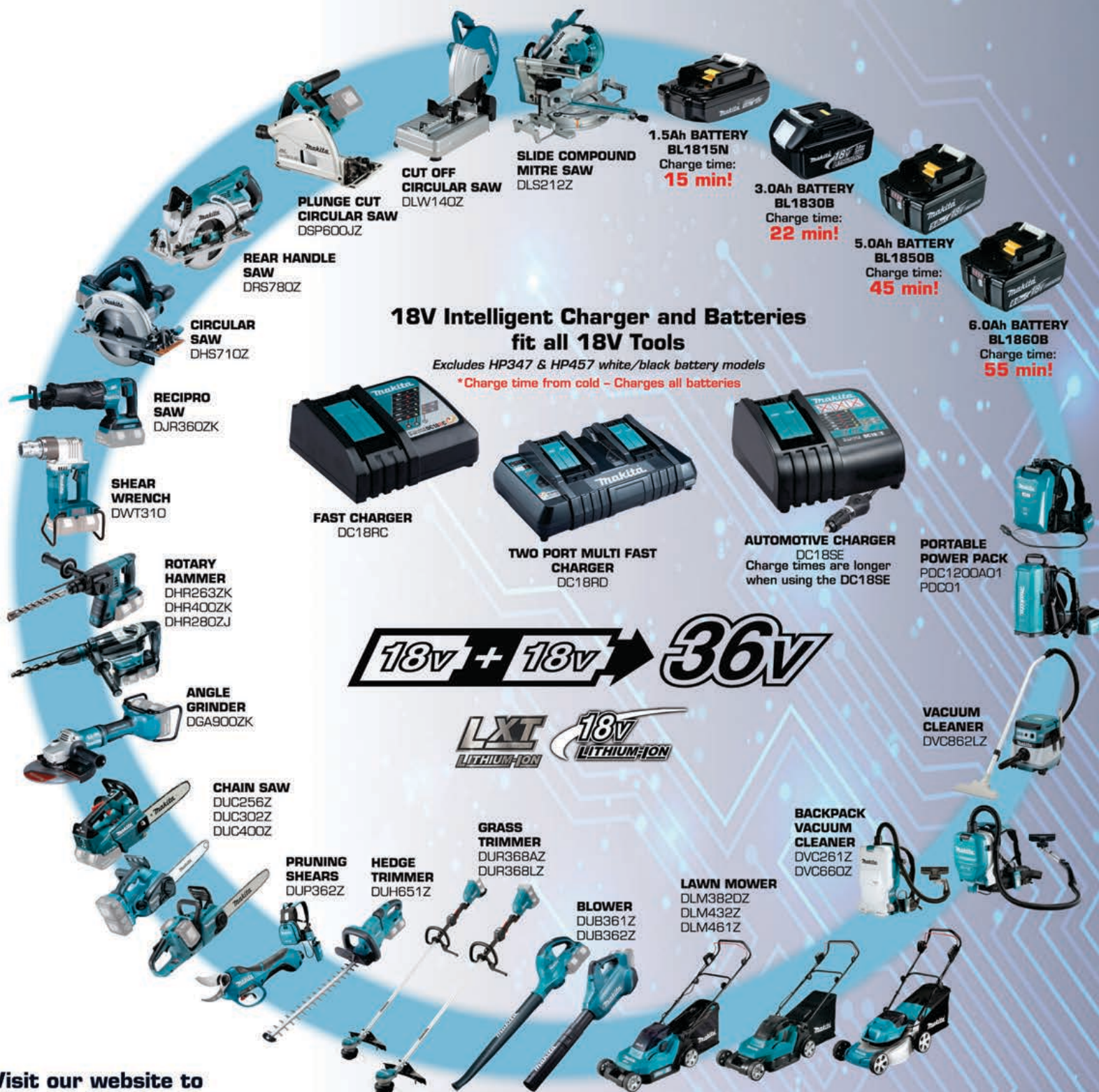
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grated, pickled or baked. Its leaves are also edible and its seeds make sprouts to eat in salads or in sandwiches.

Now is also the time to plant broad beans. The seeds are sown singly 15-20cm apart in holes 5cm deep. Double rows should be 25-30cms apart, giving you room to work in between.

Double or triple rows are less prone to damage by heavy wind and the closeness also encourages a moist micro-climate. Daily watering is most important.



Broad beans after harvesting.

These beans are of upright habit and can grow to a height of 1m, so they will need support.

Another cool-weather crop is beetroot, whose leaf will provide lovely colour in your garden. It prefers friable, rich soils with well-decomposed organic matter.

Plant the seeds directly in the bed 5-6cms apart in shallow holes and covered with about 2cms of soil. Weed control is essential during the early stages. Beets can be pulled from the time they are 5cm in diameter, which should be eight to nine weeks after sowing.

You can also cut some of the young leaves to use in salads. Keep a watch for cutworms.

Swiss Chard or spinach will give you a fine green display to lift your spirits. It can be grown in a wide variety of soil but it is a heavy feeder so prepare your soil beforehand.

Manure or compost must be broken down before

being applied in liberal quantities. Rake the soil to a fine tilth and plant the seed clusters 6-7.5cms apart. The seeds germinate in about five to eight days and will then need to be thinned out.

There are also herbs that are hardy enough to handle the Highveld autumn and winter.

Thyme is hardy and unfussy, it tastes good and is good for other plants. It makes a small, bushy plant and the more the leaves are picked the better it does. It doesn't like rich soil and also does well in pots.

Sage needs a little more nurturing than thyme and its growth tends to slow down and the leaves get smaller in winter. Plant it in well-drained soil in full sun.

Parsley needs full sun and fertile soil, which should be kept moist. To harvest, snip leaves off several plants rather than one.

New growth comes from the middle of the plant, so harvest the outside leaves.

Less common is chervil, a hardy annual that actually prefers cooler weather and not full sun conditions. Its delicate, fern like leaves make it a very attractive container plant.

Oreganum easily withstands winter frost but likes full sun. The more you harvest the better it grows ~ in fact you'll have to keep cutting it back.

You can also have a look in your local nursery for vegetable seedlings to add further variety to your beds.

No matter what you plant though, try not to get carried away ~ all of us smallholders are guilty of planting too many vegetables at the same time, finishing up with a glut and a family wailing "Not beans again!"

Think about how many vegetables you need per serving and how many of that particular vegetable you will get per seed and plant accordingly. You can always plant more after a couple of weeks, to ensure a constant supply.

Some vegetables also lend themselves to preserving through freezing, drying or including in sauces or chutneys, if you have the time or inclination to lay in supplies.

So once more you can turn to your veggie garden as treatment for the seasonal blues. 🌱

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IN THE KITCHEN

A colourful plant with many uses

All hail the versatile nasturtium! We all know and love the cheerful flowers, but do you know what else this attractive plant can do for you?

Apart from decorating the garden, nasturtiums can be used as companion plants amongst tomatoes, radish, cabbage and cucumbers. Or, plant them under fruit trees to help to deter aphids and pests.

They also act as an aphid trap ~ their colourful display draws the pests away from your precious produce.

When it comes to providing food, the leaves, flowers and the seeds of the nasturtium can be put to very flavourful uses. The flowers can be eaten in salads, chopped up to flavour butter, stuffed with herbed cream cheese or used to decorate cupcakes or larger cakes. The leaves have a mustardy, slightly sharp flavour. They can be chopped raw into salads, used to make pesto, cooked, used to flavour vinegar or dried.

Here are some simple nasturtium recipes.



Nasturtiums have brightly coloured flowers.

Nasturtium Pesto

Makes 2 cups

Ingredients

4 cups nasturtium leaves

2 cups nasturtium flowers

1½ cups olive oil

5 cloves garlic

1 - 1½ cups pine nuts or sunflower seeds

1 to 1½ cups shredded Parmesan cheese

Pick a basket full of fresh, healthy leaves and flowers without any blemishes. If your plants aren't blooming at the moment, using only the leaves is fine too.

Thoroughly wash and dry the leaves and flowers; tear larger leaves in half. Add the leaves, flowers, garlic, olive oil, nuts or seeds and Parmesan to a blender or food processor and blend all the ingredients until the mixture is smooth. Ladle the pesto into small sterile jars, refrigerate, and enjoy! The pesto should keep for up to two weeks.

Stuffed Nasturtium Leaves

Your stuffing can be similar to what goes into Greek dolmades or you can make a vegetarian mixture, using onion, mushrooms, butternut and herbs. They can be served as snacks, starters or main course, warm or cold.

Ingredients

About 20 fresh nasturtium leaves, with their stems trimmed

¾ cup vegetable or chicken stock

For the Filling

1 cup cooked rice

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

1-3 garlic cloves minced

1 cup chopped seeded tomato

500 g minced beef, lamb or pork

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1/3 cup toasted chopped nuts or sunflower seeds
 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
 1/2 cup chopped nasturtium flowers
 1 1/2 tablespoons capers or pickled nasturtium seeds
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 teaspoon lemon juice
 Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 180°. Grease a large glass or ceramic baking dish. Add the rice to a large mixing bowl. Heat the olive oil in a medium skillet. Add the onions and cook until they start to soften, then add the garlic and tomato. Cook the tomato for three minutes and add the mixture to the rice. Return the pan to the heat and cook the meat, stirring. Add to the rice. Stir in the chopped nuts, fresh parsley, nasturtium flowers, capers, lemon juice and olive oil. Season to taste with salt and fresh pepper.

To stuff the nasturtium leaves:

Place a nasturtium leaf on a flat work surface, stem side down. Add a scoop of filling to the centre of the leaf. Fold the two sides partially over the filling, then roll to make a parcel. Place seam side down into baking dish. Repeat with the remaining leaves. Pour stock over the leaves and cover the dish tightly. Bake for about 45 minutes.

Dried Nasturtium Leaves

The leaves can be dried in a drier or you can put them on a baking tray and dry them in your oven at a very low heat. Store the dry leaves in a glass jar or paper packet. The dried leaves can be powdered and sprinkled on to food, or mixed into salt and used like herbal seasoning.

Nasturtium Tea

Immerse 1 cup nasturtium flowers and leaves in 1 litre boiling water in a jug. Cover and allow to brew for 15 mins. Strain and drink as refreshment or to

sooth a cough or cold. You might want to add honey. People also use the tea as skin toner or hair rinse.

Nasturtium Vinegar

Pick 1-2 cups fresh nasturtium flowers. Gently shake them to make sure there are no insects hiding in the petals. Place the flowers into a glass jar. Completely cover the flowers with your chosen vinegar (white wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar or white vinegar). Add the lid to your jar and let it sit in a cool place to infuse for at least seven to 21 days. After a few days you will notice that your vinegar is turning a lovely shade of orange, red or yellow, depending on what colour flowers you use.

Pickled Nasturtium Seeds

These are known as poor man's capers. (Capers are the unripe, green flower buds of the caper bush *Capparis spinosa*.)

Ingredients

- 1 cup nasturtium seeds, still firm and green
- 1 cup white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 5 to 8 peppercorns, slightly crushed
- Sprigs of dill or thyme. or bay leaves
- 2 tsp sugar

Pick nasturtium seeds from the nasturtium plants while they are still green and rinse them in a bowl of cold water. Place the clean pods in a glass jar. Boil the vinegar, salt, pepper and sugar. Add a few sprigs of fresh dill/thyme or a couple of bay leaves to seeds in the jar, then pour pickling solution over. Seal and place in a dark, cool, spot. Allow to pickle for at least one to two weeks. 🌿



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Common mistakes new smallholders make

When a new neighbour moves in, the old hands in the neighbourhood look on while the newbie makes the same mistakes as most have made before.

Straight from town, the new maplotter doesn't realise how important their water supply is, so they take the seller's word when told the borehole strength and consistency and how new the pump is.

They don't get their soil tested, until they discover that they have bought a sand pit or have clay more befitting a brickyard.

When they plant fruit trees, they don't know about the unwritten rule followed by delivery staff. This is that when you deliver goods to a plot it is perfectly acceptable to help yourself to fruit. Moral of the story: plant the early ripening varieties at the back of the orchard and put a fence around your trees.

And talking of planting, newbie maplotter is so excited at having so much space and set about planting enough vegetables to feed the five thousand. Then they freeze what they can and give away a great deal, which can prove costly.

Hopefully, they give their excess produce to worthy causes such as children's homes.

Or, their townie friends begin to dread their visits as there are only so many cabbages a family can eat in a year.

When they acquire livestock or poultry they forget that often goedkoop is duurkoop, literally cheap is expensive.

As a wise old smallholder used to say, a poor quality chicken or sheep eats just as much as a well-bred one. Rather get fewer, but of better quality.

But probably the most common mistake is to fail to focus on one thing at a time. So they will put chickens in the hen house, get a small ~ or not so small - flock of sheep, they will plant a field of mielies or lucerne and rows and rows of vegetables and fruit trees, they will install a bee hive and maybe even get pigs and a cow. And rabbits.

And, inevitably, they will give into "Daddy, pleasee can we get a pony?" After a few weeks the pony will spend its days grazing in a field.

And Daddy will wonder what happened to all his money.

So, if you are an experienced smallholder, take your new neighbour under your wing. You'll be able to save him a heap of money and heartache.✿

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Try a chicken garden for free range hens

Plant a chicken garden and you will be a happy smallholder with happy chickens. If your chickens do not have free reign over your entire garden, you can develop your chicken garden in one of two ways: you can either have a fenced off portion of your garden where they are allowed to range, and where you have planted a select variety of vegetables and herbs, or you can plant certain vegetables for them in their chicken pen. Either way, they will have access to a good variety of food, so in this way you are supplementing their diet. This means you will need less bought food.

Their time in their chicken patch will be stimulating for them, as they will be exploring the area, looking for tasty things to eat. A greater variety of food means healthier chickens and more, as well as tastier, eggs. The herbs not only add to the variety, but some of them act as natural dewormers and help in the fight against external parasites. The plants also provide shade and protection from wind and rain. You can also harvest some vegetables for your own table.

Vegetables to plant

Curcubits are good: pumpkins, Hubbard and gem squashes, butternuts, marrows, cucumbers and melons. The broad leaves will encourage insect life underneath, which the hens will love. You will need to keep an eye on the vegetables though and as soon as they are ripe you'll need to pick them if you want to eat them yourself or if you want to store them for

winter. Some of them can be left for the fowls to eat. Legumes such as green beans and peas are nutritious. Make sure that the hens do not have access to dry uncooked beans however, as these are poisonous to them. They may eat the leaves as well.

If you are growing mealies you can give whole cobs to your poultry to peck. It is preferable to peel off the leaves as the fibres might cause digestion problems. The *umbellifer* family includes carrots, celery, parsnips and fennel. Chicken enjoy the green parts of these vegetables, as well as the root vegetables.

Other vegetables to include are lettuce and sunflowers.

For various reasons do not plant much from the *brassica* family (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, turnips, radish) or from the *chenopodiaceae* family (Swiss chard, spinach, beetroot.)

Do not plant any of the *solanaceae* or nightshade family (potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, peppers). The plants and their produce contain solanine, which is poisonous for poultry.

Onions and rhubarb are also problematic.

Herbs to plant

Different herbs are grown for different reasons. Oregano is one of the best and mint, lavender and basil are great favourites. You can also try parsley, comfrey, chamomile, dill, lemon balm, rosemary, sage and thyme. Nasturtiums are also good for them.

Fruits

We know chickens enjoy strawberries. If other berries grow in your area you can try blueberries, raspberries and gooseberries.

And if weeds come up in your chicken garden, there are many that they will eat as well.

If you do not want to dedicate a whole garden to your chickens, you can still grow all of these plants and feed them to your flock or strew them (in the case of the herbs) in their nesting boxes and dust baths. 🌿



Hens enjoy wandering around a growing garden.

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Agrichem contamination grows

Contaminants of emerging concern (CECs) is a term used by scientists who test water quality. It refers to pollutants that have been detected in water bodies, which have previously been at levels below detection limits. They may have negative impacts on human, animal or ecological health. There are many sources of these CECs, but smallholders need to take note of agricultural activities which are contributing to the CEC build up. Among them are veterinary medications and hormones given to livestock which can affect the soil and cause water pollution. For example, antimicrobial medication excreted in animal faeces upsets the microbial balance that is so important in our soil. In the Swiss Alps, for example, cowpats now dry out and last for season after season because the remnants of chemicals in cattle dewormers render them toxic to the insects and microorganisms that would ordinarily bring about their decomposition. Contaminants in livestock urine can leach into our water resources.

Chemicals used in pesticides also cause damage in living soil and will also pollute ground water. To make the pesticides more effective, some of them are produced in nanoparticulate form, which means that less pesticide is used. However, potential toxicological effects and impacts of nanopesticides for environmental and food safety have received little attention.



Agrichemicals.

Excess nutrients from fertilisers can run off into the waterways or even contaminate groundwater. In rivers or dams this can cause eutrophication, which is a depletion of



Using a pesticide or fertiliser.

oxygen in the water. This causes algae to accumulate on the surface. After algae die, they sink to the bottom and decompose. The bacteria decomposing the algae consume the oxygen dissolved in water. This will affect fish and other creatures in the water. They either migrate to other areas or die.

Accumulation of these various residues increases their concentrations in the environment, that later has negative impacts on environmental health. Humans and animals might be exposed to the contaminants either via food or water ingestion. Sometimes this results in short term illnesses such as headaches, vomiting, rashes and diarrhoea. Long term effects are not yet fully understood.

Smallholders therefore have a responsibility to try to avoid environmental contamination.

Take care in the administration and handling of veterinary products.

Create conservation buffers to catch runoff.

Apply fertilisers in the proper amount, at the right time of year and with the right method, so as to significantly reduce how much fertiliser reaches water bodies. It is better to avoid use of inorganic agricultural inputs, eg, inorganic fertilizers and harsh chemicals.

Keep your livestock and their waste out of streams.

Have a manure management plan.

Avoid illegal dumping of animal and agricultural waste. 🌿



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Maintaining your irrigation systems

We're told often enough that South Africa is a water scarce country, and the pressure on our water resources is growing. In addition, energy costs are very high.

Therefore, it is crucial that irrigation systems apply water as effectively and uniformly as possible.

However, available resources can only be used optimally if the equipment functions as effectively as possible.

Regular maintenance has an important influence on maintaining optimal performance of the equipment and reducing breakdowns.

As with any equipment, this also applies to irrigation systems. It also has a significant positive impact on the useful life of the system, the running costs and ultimately the yield in irrigation farming.

It is therefore very important that the performance of the equipment used be maintained as specified in the system design.

There are several factors that cause an irrigation system to not function optimally, including one or more of the following:

- ☐ Faulty or poor design;
- ☐ Problems with the equipment or supply system;

☐ Management and maintenance;
So the recent publication of *Guidelines for the Maintenance of Irrigation Systems* (Fanie Vorster, Agricultural Research Council) will be welcomed by smallholders and small farmers alike.

In this publication the focus is on the maintenance requirements of the different types of irrigation systems, as well as pumps.

Filters and water quality are also discussed in the chapter on micro and drip irrigation systems.

A grower usually only approaches an irrigation expert when problems with their irrigation system are observed.

By following a regular maintenance programme, a farmer can prevent damage, crop losses or wastage of resources due to a system that does not function properly any more, after it has initially worked satisfactorily.

The guide costs only R70.

An Afrikaans edition is also available, titled *Riglyne vir die Instandhouding van Besproeiingstelsels*.

For enquiries on purchasing this manual, contact Elmarie Stoltz at stoltze@arc.agric.za. 🌿

BOOKSHELF

Identify mammals with this new guide

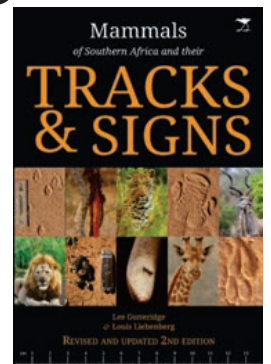
Mammals of Southern Africa & their Tracks & Signs (Revised & Updated 2nd Edition) by Lee Gutteridge & Louis Liebenberg is now in stores. A useful feature is the very detailed animal track and spoor illustrations, which are now as close to actual size as possible to help trackers, rangers and bush-lovers to more easily identify the species.

There is updated species information and photographs. It also serves as an identification guide to the mammals of southern Africa as full colour photographs of each animal are included.

This book was made possible with the support of Century 21 Wildlife Properties. It is published by

Jacana Media and recommended price is R320.

Lee Gutteridge has two equally significant companion titles in this series: *The Invertebrates of Southern Africa & their Tracks & Signs* as well as *The Birds of Southern Africa & their Tracks & Signs*. 🌿



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EVENTS

Dexter Cattle Auction

BKB is hosting an auction together with the Overvaal Dexter Klub. Animals on auction will include cows with calves, bulls, weaned calves, and more.

Dates: 12 March 2022. 11h00.

Location: Willem Prinsloo Agricultural Museum, R104 Old Pretoria Road, Rayton.

Contact: 063 514 1035 or 083 229 2500.

Solar Power System Course

Do you want to move away from the Eskom network? Not sure what information can be trusted? Are you thinking of having a solar power system installed or even doing it yourself?

This very short and comprehensive photovoltaic solar design and installation course was created to address the need of individuals, organisations or small businesses that require basic information on the size, rating and installation of solar systems. Where possible, the course contains practical elements eg, testing voltage and short-circuit current of solar panels, doing experiments with shade and partial shade on panels. This course is ideal for Do-It-Yourself enthusiasts, people with little or no electrical knowledge, as well as electricians and other craftsmen.

Included is a presentation guide.

No formal prerequisites are required to attend this course.

Excitement about renewable energy and an eager mind will do.

This course contains obvious calculations.

The course is presented by Carel Ballack, who has been involved in the Energy and Renewable Energy sector for over 17 years.

Dates: 9 April 2022. 08h00-17h00.

Costs: R1500 per person early discount (available until 23 March). Thereafter, R1800 per person.

Location: Diamond Valley, Pretoria, Gauteng.

Contact: 087 231 1644 or email riaan@kragdag.co.za for more information or to book.

Nampo Harvest Day

Grain SA's annual Nampo Harvest Day event in Bothaville, North West is confirmed for May of this year.

Dates: 17-20 May 2022.

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Our new meadow - yeah, right!

If you have lived on a smallholding for any length of time, chances are you have planned something, built something, planted something or tried to grow something, only to find that, firstly, it required a lot more work than you'd imagined. And secondly, that it probably cost you a lot more than you had budgeted for.

And, thirdly, the end result was less of a success than you'd hoped for.

Finally, we smallholders are, above all, capable. We know it all, and can do it all. And we never need outside help or advice (and often ignore it anyway if even freely given).

Personally, one of my more recent follies (and there have been many) was to establish an indigenous "meadow" of wild flowers and veld grasses, in the middle of what can be described as a formal garden. This was to be an attractive replacement for a large expanse of monotonous lawn, now surplus to requirements as our children are all adults and so have no further use for what was their makeshift soccer field and cricket pitch.

First, an attractive kidney-shaped area was mapped out, the kikuyu within was removed, and the hard ground dug over and augmented with compost.

Next, to make a focal point to the meadow three very large rocks were manoeuvred into position in the centre and placed adjacent to one another to make a natural-looking plant "pot", which was duly filled with soil ready for planting.

Then, getting into the spirit of the thing and quite unbidden, our farm hand "procured" a lovely aloe plant which was planted inside the rocks.

To make the meadow more colourful than mere grasses we dug up some indigenous bulbs from our fields, lovely hypoxis, aka African potato, and some colourful pink mini gladioli.

These were duly planted in groups around the edge. To help establish some micro-environment for bugs and beetles a couple of decaying tree stumps where dragged in and deposited randomly around the centrepiece, and one was strategically positioned and levelled near the edge of the bed, which we topped with a birdbath.

And, finally, the grasses.

I chose Smutsfinger and Rhodes grass, because of their attractive, wavy seed heads when they mature.

The first rains came, and the meadow burst into life.

Along with the grasses, however, came a healthy crop of blackjacks and, bizarrely, giant zinnia flowers. But I hadn't reckoned with just one thing.

In a field, being grazed by livestock, or cut and baled for hay, Smutsfinger and Rhodes grass will never really reach its full growing potential.

In a formal "meadow" both species can, and do, grow to 1,8m tall, thereby totally concealing the attractive aloe growing in the centre and the bulbs, now attempting to flower.

It's only when something attracts the attention of our two mongrel killer dogs that the meadow grasses are parted and we can get a glimpse of what lies within. I console myself by looking at the wavy flower heads of the tall grasses, because, in short, the whole exercise hasn't quite been what I envisaged, and maybe required the advice of a landscaper.

Which, of course, I would never resort to, because I'm a go-it-alone smallholder.



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