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FEBRUARY 2023

YOUR GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL PLOT LIVING

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Smallholders: A bright future



Call us what you like ~ hillbillies, smallholders, maplopters, homesteaders, whatever ~ a question we are sometimes asked is "isn't the smallholder lifestyle dying in the modern age?" Our answer, always, is no. If anything it's growing. Sure, the nature of smallholding life is changing. Heaven knows, the *Smallholder* magazine has seen huge changes over the past 23 years alone. But at its core, societal pressures as much as economic realities are seeing to it that significant numbers of families look for more space to live on than is afforded them in a security complex or suburb.

But it's also important to note that in the past 25 years, or even less, two distinct classes of smallholder can be identified in South Africa.

On the one hand there are the "traditional" smallholders, who have constituted the core of our readership since the magazine started 23 years ago. These can be broadly described as individuals and families who live on larger-than-urban plots, close to established towns and cities, and who may or may not keep livestock, may or may not grow crops, or may or may not earn an income from their land, with some working from home and others commuting into town for their jobs. On the other, South Africa has always had a huge subsistence farmer sector, with what were derisively-described "peasants" eking out their existence with minimal support on patches of land probably unsuitable for sustainable agriculture of any sort.

And successive South African governments through the ages have used the establishment of families on small semi-rural plots of land as a solution to various social, political and economic issues.

At the end of World War 2 the smallholding lifestyle received a huge boost when the government of the day needed to attend to the welfare of otherwise-

unemployed returning White servicemen. (Returning Black servicemen were given a bicycle). Thus were born areas of plotland that still exist today. Norton Home Estates and Benoni Small Farms are examples of just two such areas, of which there are many countrywide. Later, millions of smallholders were established through the forced removals of the Apartheid era when urban residents were booted out of their homes, transported lock stock and barrel and dumped in the newly-proclaimed "homelands" with zero support, either financial or practical.

Although the government of today has no need to house returning servicemen, it does need to establish hundreds, if not thousands, of young, dynamic Black families on plots of land on which they can become economically productive citizens, while at the same time contributing significantly to the food security of their communities. And this the government is doing with, it should be said, varying degrees of success. Much depends on the quality of the land, access to water, power and markets, of the small farms thus established. But much also depends on the enthusiasm and drive of those granted the land, and the level of support they receive. And support does not necessarily mean free or assisted handouts of inputs such as seed and feed, or of infrastructure such as tractors, pumps and implements. Often it means mentoring and training, and often it means commercial support with marketing, pricing and distribution. These new enterprising smallholder farmers thus constitute an important readership market for this magazine, as well as a potentially lucrative market for our advertisers.

Pete Bower

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FRONT COVER

Grim Reaper, a black Boerboel puppy, in early stages of protection training. Image: Clarice Walton

Leaving plot-life: The end of an era

Sir ~ My parents, who have lived on a plot for more than 30 years, have bought a house in the suburbs. After raising their three kids, many dogs, cats, horses, sheep, chickens, ducks, etc, it was time for them to downsize. A plot ~ as you know ~ is a never ending stream of hard, but (sometimes) rewarding, work. And as they enter their 70s, the physicality of living on and running a plot became too much for them, not to mention that we three kids have all "flown the coop", so the two of them are rattling around like dried peas in a pod in a house that is far too big for them. And of course the financial burden should also not be discounted.

There are a small number of people in this world who will understand the feeling of having to leave your plot, your readers being most of them. So I wanted to share in my own way the sentimentality of plot life.

As a kid, I didn't appreciate being on a plot. My friends all lived in town and were much closer together, they would walk to each other's houses and

hang out without me. Getting anywhere required a minimum 15 minute drive and as a surly teenager, needing to factor that travel time into my sleep schedule, annoyed me.

As a young adult, I have grown to appreciate not only the lifestyle we experienced as kids but also the joy it brought my parents.

Growing my own vegetables now, I know the pride one feels when one can say that the salad you have served your guests was grown entirely by you, or being able to take a basket full of fresh produce to friends when you visit. My parents never showed up anywhere empty handed ~ all their friends got fresh eggs, or homemade jam, or a freshly-picked cabbage, any time they visited.

While my family, for now, are leaving plot-life I hope that one day, perhaps when finances allow, I can start my own a self-sufficient lifestyle, just as my parents taught me.

Jessica Theron

Pretoria East

WEATHER

Dry summer as temperatures soar

Although Gauteng's rainy season started off quite promisingly ~ even when compared to last year's sodden record ~ the amount of precipitation that has fallen, while not exceptionally little, still falls far short of last year, with no month this season even approaching the corresponding monthly total rainfall last season.

And, January has proven particularly dry, with fewer than 50mm having been measured to the second half of the month, compared to more than 220mm last January.

These figures are for rainfall measured in Eastern Gauteng, and are likely to upend the predictions of weathermen last year that the southern hemisphere would experience better than average rainfall in the second half of the rainy season.

Meanwhile, most of the country has spent January in

the grips of a heat wave, with temperatures in some regions reaching the mid-30s.

Fire warnings were issued for the Western Cape and Central Karoo for late January.

Finally, as predictions for the coming months begin to emerge, weather experts have declared the shifting from a La Niña system to El Niño will occur later this year. While an El Niño season does not necessarily mean drought, it does typically bring drier weather to South Africa with hot summer temperatures.

Following two years of La Niña, smallholders are thus warned to brace for drier conditions. 🌱

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NSPCA speaks out against handling of tiger's escape

The omnishambles that played out on the plotlands of Walkerville last month, and which resulted in the death of a female Bengal tiger, highlights a glaring shortcoming in South Africa's animal welfare laws.

And it shines a spotlight on an industry that might be much bigger than many would have thought, namely the keeping and breeding of exotic, ie non-African, animals.

In a statement released after the tiger, named Sheba, was shot and killed the NSPCA said:

"Contrary to some reports, the tigress was not captured and then euthanised.

The owner failed to capture her safely and ultimately she was shot and killed after entering a populated dwelling in the area. The NSPCA and the local SPCA (Vereeniging and Vanderbijlpark) were not contacted and did not form part of the decision to shoot and kill the animal.

"This is not the first case of a wild animal escaping captivity, nor is it the first time that the animal is made to pay the price for irresponsibility and lack of compassion.

"Due to basic legislation and no inspections by

authorities, it has become far too easy for laypeople to own and breed dangerous and exotic wild animals. In Gauteng, permits are not required to keep exotic wildlife. The only permit currently required is an import permit.

"It is evident that the basic legislation is written for the convenience of people who wish to exploit these animals. The welfare of the animal is certainly not taken into consideration, and the safety of the community is disregarded as well. If the welfare of the animals and the people were taken into account, these animals would not be kept in captivity, and the community would be protected from the dangers of an escaped wild animal.

"A man has been severely mauled, families have lost their beloved pets, and the tigress, who behaved as any wild animal would, has lost her life.

"The NSPCA is currently investigating the matter further, taking various angles into account, and is giving serious consideration to taking legal action against the owner of the tigress for the events that have unfolded.

"The SPCA remains opposed to the keeping of wildlife in captivity." ❁

Walker's Fruit Farms resident Fred Pearson penned this during the search for Sheba.

With apologies to Rudyard Kipling.

Sheba's great escape

There's a green eyed yellow Bengal to the north of
Kliprivier

It's escaped from its compound, killed two dogs and a
fallow deer

Won't be long before it's captured, of that I have no doubt
For ma plotters of the Fruit Farms are out and about
They're mounted on quad bikes and have brought along
their hounds

Intent to find the tiger grows in leaps and bounds
Dodging potholes and termite hills they race around the
plots

Like schoolkids in a sweet shop hunting jelly tots
This place named the Fruit Farms is close to Lynca Foods
But they decided to rename it, it's now called 'Tiger
Woods'.

Fred Pearson

TRAINING ARC to run courses in vegetable growing

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) Vegetable & Ornamental Plant Institute in Roodeplaat, Pretoria East is offering two courses in growing vegetables.

❑ Hydroponics Vegetable Production

The course covers systems and structures, growing media, crops, fertigation and irrigation, sanitation, marketing principles, pest and disease management, harvesting and grading, production planning/ planting programme, seedling production and record keeping. The course fee is R 3 900pp (minimum 20 people).

The training runs for 5 days.

Scheduled dates: 13-17 February; 19-23 June;

Continued on page 6

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SECURITY

Keeping guard dogs on your plot

Research shows that more than 85% of smallholders have at least one dog on their property and many have three or four. Some are kept purely as pets, and others for security or protection.

However, to depend on your dog for security or protection, you need to make sure you have the right dog with the right training and a solid foundation.

"To train a dog to be a guard dog, you need to start at eight weeks old, the drive needs to be tested and the foundation building starts immediately," advises Gauteng-based K9 trainer Clarice Walton.

A good protection dog will have a strong natural drive, along with good discipline and a strong sense of loyalty.



Boerboel.

Underlying it all, appropriate genetics gives you a bigger chance at the right dog for the right job.

Breeds that are designed to make successful guard dogs include Boerboel, Bull Terrier, Rottweiler, Rhodesian Ridgeback, Dutch Shepherd, and German Shepherd, but the number one breed for this

job, in Walton's opinion, is the Belgian Malinois.

She says the dog does not necessarily have to be pedigree, as she's trained cross breeds that did a great job at learning this skill.

She cautions against buying online. "There are lots of scams out there."

People tend to choose puppies on how cute they are, which is a big mistake when it comes to giving the dog a job. "When choosing a puppy for protection work, you must choose on drive not cuteness, and you must make sure you meet the parents and interact with them too, not just the puppy," she says. In many cases a bitch makes a better protection dog than a male.

There has been great controversy over American



American Pitbull Terrier.

Pitbull Terriers (APBT) recently. In Walton's experience, the APBT is a working breed, they make great family dogs with the right training.

Unfortunately it's not about how you raise them, because genetics play a massive role in this breed. It is strongly

TRAINING

From page 5

11-15 September 2023 (on request).

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This course is also five days long. It covers classification of vegetables, winter crops, summer crops, influence of environmental factors, fertilization and irrigation, spacing, planting times, seedling production, planting programme, marketing principles, record keeping, pest and disease management and

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advised that you get this breed from a reputable breeder. Pitbulls were also used as nanny dogs. However, this breed can be socialised successfully if done correctly, yet it is strongly advised to keep them as only dogs. All breeds need proper stimulus whether they are a pet or a working dog. Boredom leads to frustration which leads to behavioural issues.

We should not underestimate smaller breeds. For example, the Jack Russell Terrier might be small but if properly trained they can be effective guard dogs too. The JR was designed to work and hunt. Most people make the common mistake of getting them for apartment lifestyles, which is not recommended as they will thrive in a smallholding, or farm environment.



Crate training.
Image: Clarice Walton

Walton recommends that dogs should be crate trained from puppyhood. The crate provides a safe place where the dog can go when it is feeling overwhelmed. The crate meets the natural instinct to make a den. It

also helps the dog differentiate between when it is “on duty” and when it is allowed to rest, meaning the dog has a clearly defined understanding of its role as a working dog.

Crate training also assists in preparation for your dog going to kennels, or an overstay at the vet, for travelling in a crate when emigrating with owners to another country, for healing purposes, and much more.

She also states that the dog should be kept inside your home at night. “Remember, your dog is an investment.”

Plus, a dog being indoors will be better positioned to alerting you, the resident, of an intruder.

A personal protection dog needs one-on-one training and the process can take up to two years.

Trainers use a foreign language for this kind of training, to prevent anyone else being able to give commands to your dog.

The owner of the dog needs to be on hand for the training, as they also need to be taught how to manage the dog.

Training for protection dogs is far more complex than the training one will receive at a regular puppy class.

If you are interested in training a dog specifically for guarding and protecting, you must make your trainer

Continued on page 9

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From page 7

aware of this right from the beginning, so that they can tailor the programme for protection. This will include working on desensitisation, drive and discipline.

Over time the dogs are taught to bite on command, and release the bite on command.

Training a protection dog needs to be ongoing and consistent. Once your trainer has given you the tools to manage your dog, you will need to continue practicing your dog's skills and commands regularly. Keeping any dog is a commitment and a responsibility. Not only must it be well fed and kept well groomed, but it should also be up to date with inoculations, deworming and tick and flea treatments. They need to be stimulated and need adequate exercise.

Many smallholders believe that the dogs have lots of space and places of interest to explore on a plot, and indeed they do, but most will not go out into the fields on their own. Having freedom isn't enough, they still need obedience, mental and physical stimulus.

Walking your dog around the block is not enough. A working dog, such as one trained for protection and guarding, must also be given time to play and

rest.

Naturally, also, fencing must be adequate, both in terms of the size of the apertures in wire fences, and in terms of the height of the fence, to keep the dogs on the property.

Likewise, it goes without saying that attention

must be paid to ensure that the dogs don't escape when opening and closing gates. This is where obedience makes a difference.

You need to set boundaries for your dog from the beginning.

To learn more about training your dogs in personal protection or otherwise contact Clarice Walton, K9 Trainer, on 071 911 4102. 🌿



A Belgian Malinois in bite training.

Image: Clarice Walton

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
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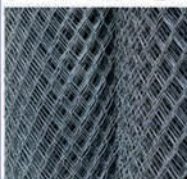
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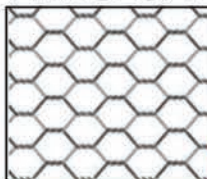
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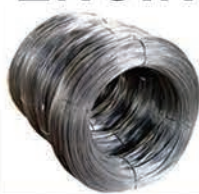
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Pollinators come in many forms

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What is pollination? When bees and other animals move around flowers, they take pollen, which forms on the male part of the flowers, the anthers, and move it to the pistils, or female parts of the flowers. If the pollen lands in the right spot, it moves down through the pistils, to the eggs, which are inside the flower.

Pollination is also brought about by wind and water. Pollination comes before fertilization, and fertilization results directly in the plant producing seeds and fruits. Seeds are the means by which plants manage to disperse to new sites.

They are also a means by which a plant species can survive in a dormant phase, during times of drought or other stress.

Seeds and fruits are also food for humans and animals.

We tend to think that honeybees are the only pollinators. While honeybees do pollinate the vast majority of crops, there are many other insects, birds and small mammals that do a similar job.

Other bees such as leafcutter and carpenter bees, for example, are pollinators of lucerne plants, while carpenter bees pollinate the rooibos tea plant. These other bees are involved in pollinating a number of different fruits and vegetables.

Wasps also play a key role in pollination. Pollen wasps feed their larvae on pollen and nectar, like bees, and not on insects and arachnids like other wasps. They also pollinate the rooibos plant, along with some nut trees and subtropical fruits such as granadilla, avocados, litchis, papaya and mangoes. The semi-arid and desert regions of southern Africa support the most diverse and abundant populations of pollen wasps in the world.

Certain long-tongued flies (*Nemestrinidae*, *Tabanidae*, *Bombyliidae*), one of which is the horse fly, are

effective pollinators. Some of them specialise in flowers that form part of the cut flower industry. Others pollinate subtropical fruits, and some nuts. Surprisingly, rodents also act as pollinators, although they tend to work more in the floral kingdom than in pollinating fruit or vegetable flowers. Plants have adapted to bring this about by producing blossoms close to the ground, are dull coloured and produce a yeasty scent during the evening, timed in tune with the nocturnal activities of rodents. And not only rats and mice, but even the Cape grey mongoose and large-spotted genet have been captured in photos with pollen all over their faces. Another smaller South African mammal with a taste for nectar is the Cape Rock sengi (*Elephantulus edwardii*) ~ a member of the elephant shrew family.

Bats are also pollinators ~ the baobab tree, which provides shelter and food for an abundance of animals, is bat pollinated. And if you have the large agave cacti on your plot you will also need bats to pollinate them. To attract these flying mammals flowering plants have evolved a musty or rotten perfume. Some plant species have evolved



A pollen wasp, *Ceramius clypeatus* visiting a flower of rooibos plant. Image: Sarah Gess

acoustic features in their flowers that make the echo of the bat's ultrasonic call more conspicuous to their bat pollinators. Bats service many plants that are used for medicinal, cultural and economic purposes. Some beetles play a pollinating role, often of plants with bright (red, orange or yellow) odourless flowers. Many beetle species eat pollen, so the plants they visit must produce ample amounts of pollen to make sure that there is enough left to pollinate the flower after the beetles are finished eating.

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IN THE GARDEN

From page 11

Moth and butterfly pollination is relatively common in the summer rainfall region. They also help with some sub-tropical fruits.

Ants pollinate some nut flowers, while calliphorid flies and ladybirds contribute to onion pollination.

Bird pollination is well known in Africa, with sunbirds, sugarbirds and several other bird species visiting flowers regularly.

In terms of crops, honeybees are responsible for pollinating sunflowers, nut tree flowers, berries, citrus, subtropical and deciduous fruits, melons and water-melons; vegetables including pumpkin, most of the squashes, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, onion, carrots and cabbage.

On a larger scale, crop farmers need beekeepers to

bring honeybee hives to their farms for the few weeks the crop is in flower to provide the high density of bees needed for good pollination.

Honeybees are highly mobile and



Bat pollinating a baobab flower.

visit many different flowers of the same species over a fairly wide area as they feed. The indigenous South African honeybees are therefore vital to South Africa's food productivity and can be managed at the scale needed for our intensive large-scale crops.

However, honeybees and most other pollinators face threats: diminishing habitat and forage resources, pests, diseases and inappropriate agro-chemical regimes that misuse pesticides or insecticides in the agricultural environment.

Conservation of pollinators is essential for food security and conservation of biodiversity in general. The loss in biodiversity and the adverse ecological effect that would follow a broad-spectrum loss of pollinators is too alarming to contemplate.

Humans are finally realising that pollination is a service nature provides that we have tended to take for granted, and that we often do little to encourage until we start to lose it.

Pollination is a vital link in natural communities, connecting plants and animals in key and essential ways.

The wealth of types of pollinators, from butterflies to bees to birds and bats, and the wealth of variety within flowering plants have stimulated each other's

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evolution, leading to a remarkable diversity and adaptations between flowers and pollinators. Pollination is a service that is key to agriculture as well. We have just stated that insect pollinators are essential for many fruit and vegetable crops, and the demand for pollinators grows as the need for agricultural productivity increases. Unfortunately, by developing larger and larger fields and landscapes for agriculture, we also remove the habitat that pollinators may need. Pollinators have real commercial value, although this is not always appreciated. When pollinators become increasingly rare in an ecosystem, other species will usually fulfil a similar role, even if less optimally. Thus the losses may be subtle and unnoticed at first, making any early warning system for pollinator loss quite complex. When losses start to take effect, reduced seed set is the first result. Then follows increased inbreeding within a crop or population ~ again, an effect not readily apparent to non-specialists.

Pollinators are small, industrious animals that rarely manage to get onto the agenda of policymakers, yet we need a policy environment that recognises the quiet, fundamental role that pollination plays in food security and biodiversity conservation.

As current habitat and forage resources are dwindling, we need to protect and maintain existing

pollinator-friendly vegetation and plant more pollinator-friendly plants (as long as they are appropriate to the specific localities to prevent hybridisation or invasions).



A butterfly on an onion bloom.

Soil fertility can complement the needs of pollinators in and around farm fields. A healthy, nutrient-rich soil that contains organic matter is good for crops and allows certain types of pollinators to complete their life cycles. Flowers of crops, on the other hand, provide nectar and pollen that are necessary for some pollinators to survive. The following practices will protect pollinators and improve the soil's fertility and structure:

- ☐ Minimal tillage of soil.
- ☐ Crop rotation with legumes.
- ☐ No burning.
- ☐ Planting of cover crops such as legumes on unplanted lands will provide nitrogen to the soil and nectar and pollen to pollinators.
- ☐ Intercropping (the growing of two or more crops

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25mm	x	50mm	2.50mm
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IN THE GARDEN

How to propagate vegetables and fruit

Smallholders wanting to grow fruit and vegetables don't always have to start from scratch. In fact, there are many ways in which you will be able to generate new plants from what you already have.

Plant propagation is the act of increasing the number of viable plants through asexual reproduction, also known as vegetative propagation. This means producing new plants from vegetative parts of the original plant, such as stem, roots, nodes or leaves. The most common types of propagation include

POLLINATORS

From page 13

closely together) will create diverse farming systems.

□ Planting of trees in and around fields will mimic the natural environment and allow beneficial insects to thrive.

Leaving areas of a smallholding uncultivated will provide the necessary habitat for pollinators to thrive. For example, carpenter bees depend on logs for their nests, honeybees may build nests in tree cavities or termite mounds, while mason bees use clay and leaf cutter bees use leaves.

cuttings, grafting and budding.

Cuttings

There are many benefits of using cuttings to increase your vegetable plant numbers. First, the new plants you create are exact clones of the mother plant ~ this means that if you have a plant with particularly favourable characteristics (high yield, good structure, etc) your new plants will have the same characteristics. Your cuttings, having already established leaves or stems, will mature quicker so your harvest will

A strip of uncultivated land around a smallholding field can also act as a windbreak which helps to reduce soil erosion. The removal of invasive weeds before they go to seed will ensure that they do not invade natural areas.

Natural areas are important safe havens for pollinators and ensure that other ecosystem services continue. Not only do natural enemies of crop pests benefit from these areas, but they also serve as carbon sinks that reduce greenhouse gases. 🌿



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happen sooner than when using seeds or seedlings. Additionally, you are saving on costs by cutting down the need for seeds or seedlings.

On the other hand, there are a few disadvantages to using cuttings. First, you might be decreasing the biodiversity of the species and surrounding land. By creating clones, you will recreate any anomalies in the plant, which might include high susceptibility to certain diseases. So it is important to keep a close watch on your mother plants to ensure they are not affected by common diseases.

When taking cuttings from mother plants, you need to ensure that your cuttings contain the section of a plant that holds the genetic material. Not all plants carry their genetic details in their stems, or leaves. In some cases, you will need to ensure your cutting contains the growth points, or nodes.

Common plants that can be successfully grown from stem and leaf cuttings include tomatoes, pumpkin, marrow (zucchini), cucumber, nasturtium, eggplant, peppers and purslane.

When taking a cutting, make sure your scissors or knife are clean and sterile. You will also need a rooting hormone, available in powder form from your nursery, as well as a rooting medium ~ moist coco coir, sphagnum moss, peat moss or vermiculite.



If you are using coco coir (pictured above) or peat moss as a rooting medium, make sure to keep it moist at all times.

Leaf cuttings need one to two centimetres of stem (called the "petiole"). Do a quick dip of the cutting into the hormone powder. Knock off the excess powder before inserting the base of the leaf in the rooting medium.

Stem cuttings are usually seven centimeters or more long. Cut them from the stem at about one centimeter below a node (leaf joint). Dip the cutting into the rooting hormone, knock off the excess and place into the rooting medium.

Remove enough lower leaves so about half of the stem can be inserted into the rooting medium.

Keep your rooting medium moist, well lit and ventilated. Once roots have developed, you can transplant into soil.

Grafting

This method involves joining a stem piece or a single bud on to the stem of a plant that has roots. The stem piece or bud is called the scion, and the plant with roots is called the rootstock. Grafting is commonly used to produce fruit trees, sometimes with more than one variety of the same fruit species growing from the same stem. The tissues of the graft become integrated with the tissues of the rooted plant and develop as a single plant over time.

Grafting can only be done with trees that are genetically compatible. Rootstocks and scions that belong to the same botanical species are always compatible, so anything that is an apple, can be grafted to another apple, for example.

Rootstocks and scions from different species in the same genus are also usually compatible. An example of this is within the genus *Prunus* or the stone fruit genus, which includes apricots, peaches, plums, nectarines, cherries and almonds.

Finding rootstock to buy can be difficult. Most nurseries do not sell them as they will sell the tree once grafted. But, grafting can also be used to restart

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From page 17

or improve productivity of an old tree.

There are a few different ways to graft a tree. Bark grafting is the most successful option to restart fruit development on an old tree, or to change the variety on a productive rootstock. For this technique, you peel the bark back to expose the cambium and then insert the scion.

In whip and tongue grafting this is done when corresponding cuts through rootstock and scion material are joined end to end and then bound. The interlocking 'tongues' add structural support to the join as the cambium layers heal and fuse together, as well giving a larger surface area of cambial contact.

This method takes practice, and you will need a very sharp knife, elastic bands and wax to hold the join together.

Professional grafters will invest in grafting cutters which cut both bits to be joined in perfect symmetry, ensuring maximum contact between the two cut parts.

Budding

Budding or bud grafting can be done in summer when trees are starting to produce buds. Find a vegetative bud (leaf bud) about halfway down a branch on the selected tree. For this it is helpful to know that fruiting buds tend to be rounder and stick out from the stem, where vegetative buds tend to be pointier and pressed against the stem. Cut out a one centimetre oval or



Bud attached to stem with grafting tape.

shield shape around the bud, being careful to only cut into the bark and not the pith. The pith is the colored, fleshy part of the branch that runs right through the center. Remove any existing leaf from the removed bud but keep the leaf stalk (petiole). On the branch you will be grafting on to, remove all leaf buds or side branches.

Make a two centimetre T-shaped cut on the bark of the branch. Peel back the bark and insert the new bud into the branch. Make sure the bud is pointing in the same direction on the new branch as it was on the old. Wrap the area around the bud with grafting tape or elastic bands.

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Try your hand at farming guinea fowl

South African smallholders might consider following the examples set by southern and West African small scale farmers who are farming guinea fowl as a small commercial venture. The main reason for this is that guinea fowl are more resistant to poultry diseases than chickens. Smallholder farmers have limited resources and little access to veterinary support, so the birds' hardiness is an advantage.

In Ghana the World Bank has been supporting guinea fowl farmers through a capacitation framework. In the northern part of the country, guinea fowl production accounts for 7% of total poultry production. However, little work has been done on genetic improvement, so poor hatchability and the high mortality of keets continues to restrict the farmers. In Botswana the department of agriculture is also encouraging young farmers to grow guineas. In the USA these gamebirds are becoming increasingly popular among keepers of small and backyard flocks.

The helmeted guinea fowl, also called impangele birds or tarentaal, is the most common breed of guinea fowl in South Africa. Their feathers are dark grey with white spots. They have a red-coloured wattle on either side of their short beaks. Their bald faces and necks are covered in blue skin.



Helmeted guinea fowl.

Generally, they reach around 58 to 64cm in length and can weigh up to 1.8kg. There is little difference in looks between male and females, but their calls are different. There are a number of reasons for keeping guineas. They are pest control experts and eat a wide variety of insects, as well as mice. They are good at clearing up ticks and grasshoppers, so are useful on your plot among crops and livestock.

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Growing from scraps

Re-growing vegetables also doesn't have to be very complicated and scientific. A number of common vegetables can be grown from their discarded roots.



Regrowing celery.

Lettuce heads, cabbages, spinach, fennel and celery can be grown by keeping the base of the plant in water. You will start to see new growth of leaves as long as your plants are getting adequate light and you are changing the

water regularly. You can choose to replant these once roots develop, or keep them growing on your windowsill for convenience.

Root vegetables such as carrots, turnips, radish and beetroot can be grown in a similar way, by putting

their tops (the parts with the leaves) in water. You can harvest and use these greens as they grow, or you can allow the roots to continue growing until the plants are ready to be transplanted back into the ground. Onions, green onions, garlic and leeks can be re-grown from the rooting base of the bulb or stem. Take a small section of the base of a bulb or stem, with the roots attached, and place it in a shallow dish of water. Fairly quickly, new, green material will begin to grow from this base section. These re-sprouting sections can then simply be harvested again. Or you can plant them out in your garden or in pots placed near a sunny windowsill. 🌱

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From page 21

Nut farmers in KwaZulu-Natal have had success in using a flock of guinea fowl to keep down stinkbugs, thrips and macadamia nut borers. They are surface eaters, so don't go scratching in your garden like chickens do. However, don't allow them into a vegetable patch with tender seedlings.

They are also very good at warning of intruders, be they predators or people. They are loud. Indeed, their loudness is sometimes used as a reason not to keep them.

Like chickens guinea fowl have strong personalities. They are hardy and do well in most climatic regions. If they are free range they don't require much feeding, as they are devouring the bugs on your plot. The meat and eggs are delicious and nutritious. If you decide to keep guineas, prepare a coop for them. It's important for them to understand that the coop is where they sleep at night and where they should lay their eggs. This is to prevent them from roosting in trees, where they are more vulnerable to predators. Broody hens can be very secretive about where they lay their eggs and sit on them, but they are not very successful at keeping their babies alive once they have hatched. Smallholders with dogs will know this. So it is better for them to use the coop.

Perching bars should be provided, as they prefer to roost. This allows them to fluff their feathers to allow air in to help cool their bodies during the summer and allows the warm air from their body heat to warm their legs and feet during the winter. So they need enough room to be able to do this.

If you want to provide nesting boxes you can use the ones that are available for chickens or you can build something bigger. When a guinea hen is broody she might be sitting on up to 40 eggs. Cover the floor with absorbent bedding material such as wood shavings, peanut shells, chopped hay or straw. If the litter is kept dry, it can stay in place for several months. Guinea fowl droppings are drier than chicken manure, so there is less of a problem with mould.

It is best to get them while they are young keets, so that you can train them to lay eggs in the coop and to return to the coop at night.

Because the parents are not always effective at keeping their keets safe, keepers often put the eggs under broody hens or put them in an incubator.

It is also recommended that you do not try to rear them with your chickens, as they can be quite aggressive. 🌿

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How to load implements for transport

Want to use your tractor to load an implement onto a trailer or a bakkie but you don't have a loading ramp? Here's a method which works with most implements, but which probably doesn't meet health and safety rules, so you use it at your own risk.

First, hitch up the implement to your tractor in the usual way and position it for loading close to the trailer or bakkie, so that you can simply reverse the tractor towards the loading surface (aside the trailer, perhaps if it's a flatbed, or behind the bakkie).

The amount of driving around and maneuvering with the implement in the loading position should be kept to a minimum for safety reasons.

Next, lower the implement to the ground and remove the top link bottle screw from both the implement and tractor.

Now, without engaging the hydraulic lift, very slowly inch the tractor forward and away from the trailer/bakkie.

This will have the effect of pulling the implement forward, tipping it as it moves, the fulcrum of the movement of the implement being the bottom of the implement in contact with the ground (for example the points of the ploughshares).

The more you inch the tractor forward the further the implement will tip, until the centre hitching point of the implement lies level with, and between, the two hydraulic side-arms of the tractor lift.

Stop.

Using heavy duty webbing or strong rope tie the implement's top link to the hydraulic side arms as securely as possible.

Don't be shy to do a "belt and braces" job of securing the implement in this position: the last thing you want is for the implement to come loose when it's

suspended over the trailer/bakkie.

Engage the hydraulic lift, and raise the implement, before reversing very carefully to the trailer or bakkie. With luck the entire implement will be high enough, given the full extent of the tractor's hydraulic lifting capability, to be suspended completely above the loading surface.

Lower the implement gently until it is resting on the trailer or bakkie, untie the webbing or rope and disengage the tractor's side-arms.

Now allow the implement to rotate back into an upright position on the trailer/bakkie, keeping well clear of the rear of the implement as it does so, in case it comes down with speed.

Even if the entire implement doesn't clear the edge of the trailer or bakkie, the back will be sufficiently high to do so and you will be able to untie the implement, disengage the hydraulic arms and allow the implement to rotate back into an upright position, whereupon you can manhandle it fully into position on the loading surface.

A couple of tips and provisos:

Firstly, this method works best with ground-engaging implements, because the implement needs something on the bottom to dig into the ground and hold it still while the rest of it rotates.

It won't work with implements fitted with skids or wheels, such as slashers or trailers, which will merely continue sliding or rolling when the tractor moves away, ie they have nothing to catch in the ground to allow the rotation.

Secondly, the rotating into position of the implement is best performed on bare earth rather than paving, because of the possibility of damage to the paving surface by the points of the implements as they rotate. 🌱

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IN THE KITCHEN

How to preserve herbs for winter

As we find ourselves in the height of our growing season, you might be overrun by fresh herbs. Sadly, many herb plants do not last through the winter, so it is best that you harvest and preserve what you can now.

There are a number of ways one can keep herbs. Although they will never be as crisp as fresh herbs, frozen, dried or preserved herbs are very useful and will help elevate the flavour of dishes through the bleak winter months.

Drying Herbs

Dried herbs retain a very pungent flavour and are a great way to preserve herbs.

You can use a biltong maker to dry your herbs, or turn your thermofan oven on a very low heat with the fan on. Arrange clean and dry herbs in a single layer on a baking tray. Keep the oven door open slightly to allow moisture to escape. You can stir the herbs occasionally as well.

Some herbs will take longer to dry than others but bank on at least four hours. If you have space and the time, you can tie small bunches together and hang them upside down in a dark, warm, well-ventilated area. The drying time is about two to four weeks. You are looking for a final product that is crispy and will crumble between your fingers before you pack them into jars for storage.

Freezing

Most herbs freeze well and maintain their flavour even when frozen. However, you must remember that they will not look good after having been frozen so you should not bank on using them for garnish. Roughly chop your herbs and pack them into ice trays to freeze. Once frozen, you can put them into a

freezer bag for easy use. Add these ice cubes to pasta sauces, stews, soups and other dishes throughout the winter.

This will work well for basil, parsley (flat or curly leaf), sage, coriander, dill, chives and mint.

Herbs such as thyme and rosemary are much hardier and the plants will likely last throughout winter so you don't need to panic now about saving some leaves for winter. Although not strictly a herb, celery leaves also add a fresh savoury flavour to dishes and can be treated much the same as you would parsley.



Freezing in ice trays.

Pastes and Sauces

A large number of herbs lend themselves to being turned into a flavourful savoury paste.

These can be added to pasta dishes, used as spreads on bread or added to other dishes. The most common pestos are basil and parsley, but this will work well with sage and coriander as well.

In a food processor, blend two cups of your herb, 1/3 cup pine nuts (sunflower or pumpkin seeds are a budget-friendly alternative, toast them for added flavour), one to three garlic cloves, 1/2 cup parmesan cheese (freshly grated is preferable but that which you find in a bottle will also work), up to 1/2 cup olive oil (add the oil slowly, stop when you reach your desired consistency).

Blend until smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste.

This recipe can also be made in a mortar and pestle if you don't have a blender.

Parsley and coriander make excellent spicy sauces.

Mix half a cup of your chosen herb, finely chopped, with half a cup of olive oil, three to four cloves of

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Books for budding astronomers & snake enthusiasts

Now in its 78th year of publication, the Sky Guide Southern Africa is an astronomical handbook which is a joint effort between the Astronomical Association of Southern Africa and publishers Struik Nature.

The book is a practical resource for all stargazers, whether novice, amateur or professional. It highlights the cosmic events for each month of the upcoming year, including planetary movements, predicted eclipses and meteor showers.

Star charts plot the evening sky for each season, facilitating the identification of stars and constellations. The guide contains a wealth of information about the sun, moon, planets, comets, meteors and bright stars, with photos, diagrams, charts and images. The 2023 edition features more star charts, double the amount of astrophotos and it has greater geographical coverage.

The recommended selling price is R160.

Herpetologists, snake collectors, hikers, gardeners and reptile enthusiasts will be pleased to know that the third edition of A Complete Guide to the Snakes of Southern Africa by Johan Marais is now available.

The new edition has been updated, revised and expanded, to include new information based on scientific research relating to behaviour, identification, reproduction and snake venoms.

The comprehensive guide covers all essential aspects of snake biology and behaviour. Species descriptions are accompanied by full-colour photographs and distribution maps. Simple icons make essential information available at a glance. A separate “key features” box assists in quickly identifying species in the field. Chapters on classification and identification, keeping snakes, and the treatment of snakebite supplement the species accounts.

It is published by Penguin Random House and costs R450. 🌿

IN THE KITCHEN

garlic, two tablespoons red wine vinegar and two small chillis (or more to taste). Add salt and pepper to taste.

This can be used as a fresh sauce served with steaks and lamb similar to an Argentinean/Uruguayan chimichurri, a basting for chicken, as a salsa for Mexican food, or as a sambal for curries.

Both the spicy sauces and pestos will freeze well. Use the ice cube tray trick to have perfectly portioned homemade sauces ready throughout the year.

Herb Oils or Butter

For those with a cow in milk, making herb butter to freeze is an ideal and indulgent way to store your excess herbs. Using the ice tray method, you can freeze cubes of a herb, salt and butter mix that you can add to sauces and stews, or thaw to spread on bread or biscuits.

For a slightly less-expensive option, you can opt for herb oil. In a pot of boiling water, quickly blanch your herbs before transferring to an ice bath. This means

leaving your herbs in the boiling water for no longer than 15 seconds. Leave them to sit in the ice bath for up to five minutes and then transfer to a towel to dry. Once as dry as possible, add your herbs to a blender and slowly drizzle in oil. You can use olive oil or a sunflower oil.

For two cups of blanched herbs, you will need about half to three quarters of a cup oil. Once smooth, transfer to a sieve lined with cheesecloth (muslin) or a coffee filter. Allow the oil mixture to sit for a few hours stirring occasionally.

Do not press the mixture down, let it sieve as naturally as possible. Once done, transfer to a bottle and store in the fridge or freeze.

This oil is great in salads, as a dressing over eggs or as the base of a fresh sauce for meat. 🌿

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The humble candle

Slowly but inexorably the wheels are falling off the Eskom bus, and South Africans are beginning to adapt to a new normal: one where the provision of electrical power is no longer a given but has become something of a blessing when it's supplied and a curse when it's not.

Indeed, it won't be long before the only people making any money are candlemakers.

Ah, the candle!

The humble candle has a long and illustrious history, with some ingenious uses.

Candles have been around for thousands of years, and have been made out of just about every substance known to man through the ages, including dried insects, and even a whole fish, the Candlefish or Eulachon.

Apart from their use as a source of light, candles of various types have important roles to play in cultural and religious rituals. In some churches, for example, votive candles are lit by those in prayer while the lighting of candles is an important ritual in the Jewish faith when celebrating the Sabbath.

And candles, because they burn at a steady rate, have been used as timekeeping devices for generations. South Africans, particularly those who know their Boer history, will be well aware of the "opsitkers". This was used by wary fathers to ensure that suitors calling on their comely daughters didn't stay too long. When the swain arrived to bill and coo the father would cut a length of candle, light it and present it to the young man. The candle would duly burn, and when it burnt out the swain would know it was time to leave. Thus, the father could signal his approval or otherwise of the young man by regulating the length of the candle provided. A very short opsitkers signalled disapproval, while a long one sent a message

of encouragement in the courtship.

Overseas, candles were used as alarm clocks. Again, because of the known rate of burn of a candle, a nail, or number of nails, would be pushed into the candle at positions equivalent to the number of hours' sleep the burner desired, before the candle would be put into a metal candle holder.

When the candle burned down to the nail it would fall out and make a clanking sound as it hit the candle holder, waking the sleeper. These could also incorporate what we'd call a "snooze function" by having a number of nails consecutively added, just below the original. So that if the first didn't wake the incumbent, the second, third or fourth likely would.

But perhaps the best use of the candle as a time-keeper was the "brothel candle".

This was a small candle not unlike those found on a birthday cake, sold in boxes like matches, and designed to burn for precisely seven minutes.

Upon paying for the service to be rendered the "john" would receive a brothel candle and be shown to the bedchamber of the "lady" of his desires. He would then light the candle and get on which the job, so to speak.

He needed to be quick, because he had precisely seven minutes to... ummm... achieve his goal.

If he was, shall we say, a slow worker he would have to purchase another candle.

Ja-nee, the old ways were not necessarily stupid ways.



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