

# **SOUTH AFRICAN SMALLHOLDER**

**MAY 2023**

**YOUR GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL PLOT LIVING**

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# Ridiculous. And tragic



For the many years that I was involved with horses there was a regular annual ritual that we adhered to with religious zeal.

To keep our horses alive in what was then the Transvaal, and later Gauteng, we would inject them, around every October, with two vials of African Horse Sickness vaccine administered two weeks apart.

In that way, I am proud to say, we never lost a horse to this dreadful disease.

For the past two years, however, this annual ritual has been broken. Why? Because the sole authorised manufacturer of the vaccines, Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP), has been unable to supply the vaccine timeously and in sufficient quantities.

And it's not just owners of horses, donkeys and mules who have experienced shortages and disruptions in supply. Sheep farmers, cattle farmers and others have been affected too, with shortages of every single vaccine produced by OBP. Some observers are warning that meat prices could skyrocket if unvaccinated livestock die in sufficient numbers.

It is absurd that a situation such as this has been allowed to develop, and not unnaturally the causes are the usual befalling state-owned institutions. Cadre deployment, the resultant incompetence of management and employees, execrable planning and budgeting, blatant corruption and looting of funds, and board-level power struggles have seen to it that OBP's facilities have become dilapidated. Outdated machines, broken equipment and botched tenders for equipment and maintenance have conspired to make it impossible to manufacture vaccines to acceptable standards. This has led to international accreditation of OBP as a world-class facility lapsing or being withdrawn.

It wasn't always like this.

OBP has its origins more than 120 years ago when a

Swiss vet named Arnold Theiler founded the University of Pretoria's Dept of Veterinary Science, the first such academic and research facility in the country.

Based in Onderstepoort north of the city, its scientists and researchers soon began formulating world-first vaccines for a host of diseases for southern Africa's livestock, including one for African Horse Sickness.

The need for commercialisation of these vaccines resulted in OBP being hived off as a separate entity, still with close ties to the veterinary campus.

And then the poisonous effects of the ANC's cadre deployment and cronyist policies started to work, and what was a gradual decline developed into a near total collapse. Just as it has at Eskom, Transnet, the Post Office, the SAPS, army, navy and airforce, public health services, education, and SA Airways. To name a few.

There is light at the end of the tunnel, however. After years of stonewalling any suggestion of allowing private sector manufacturers to produce vaccines formerly the preserve of OBP, common sense has prevailed, and as this edition went to press DA shadow minister of agriculture Noko Masipa told SAFM listeners that this would now be allowed. However, it will take some time before the first privately-produced vaccines are available so this is not an immediate solution to the shortages.

And it's probably too late, now, to hope that a change of government in next year's election will miraculously right the evils of the ANC's ill-starred policies at OBP and elsewhere, and it's certainly too late for those unfortunate equines that have succumbed to African Horse Sickness in recent years.

So one might be forgiven for feeling a deep, burning anger. And despair. ~ **Pete Bower, Editor**

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# East Rand gets environmental hotline

**T**he City of Ekurhuleni has recently established a hotline for residents to report environmental crimes such as illegal dumping.

According to the city's Integrated Waste Management By-laws, illegally disposing of waste is a punishable offense that can incur a hefty sentence and even jail time.

"We have a responsibility to protect the environment and promote cleanliness. That is why we have launched this hotline," says metro spokesman Zweli Dlamini.

"Our people rely on the state of cleanliness in the city

and we have to respond and work with them to curb any act of criminality against our environment and the people of Ekurhuleni."

The By-laws are available on the Ekurhuleni website, should residents wish to be sure that an environmental crime has been committed.

Anyone wishing to report such a crime should phone 011 999 3376/2244.

Additionally, the number for the national Dept of Environmental Affairs' Environmental Crimes and Incidents Hotline is 0800 205 005. 🌿

# Big teaching role for E Rand apiary

**M**embers of the Eastern Highveld Beekeepers Association (EHBA) continue to be very positive about the educational apiary that was established in Benoni Agricultural Holdings a few months ago.

EHBA chairperson Pete Beart explained: "The long term loan of this site gives EHBA and its members massive scope to increase its educational field trips to train new keepers.

"We can also continue the involvement with local

schools to promote awareness of the importance of bees and other pollinators to our long term survival on earth."

They will also be conducting research there.

Bees from bee removals were donated by various members and placed in hives at the new apiary. They are now being fed and nursed back to health in order to survive the winter.

Beart pointed out that they are using both industry

Continued on page 4

## MAILBOX

### Imperial tools still useful

**S**ir ~ With reference to The Back Page, by Blommetjie in the April edition (*Hoarding: The old man's curse*). Keep in mind that virtually all of aviation still operates with SAE /Imperial-sized wrenches and tools. So, I can still work on my Vaaljapies, vintage farm engines, etc. ... thank you for a great magazine.

**Bo Burger, Lammermoor**

**The Editor replies** - Given how many past and modern aircraft are US-designed and built it makes perfect sense that Imperial tools are still necessary for their maintenance.

## DOING GOOD



**GOING TO THE DOGS:** Mr Lawnmower & Pool of Geduld, Springs, recently donated one ton of dog food to the Springs SPCA. Seen at the handover are (left to right): Mandie Foreman (SPCA), Cheri-Amor Jordaan (Mr Lawnmower & Pool), and Daniel Schroeder and Jullian Murray (both SPCA).

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# BEEKEEPING

From page 3

standard Langstroth hives and examples of other hive types used in Africa to demonstrate practical and cultural diversities in bee keeping.

EHBA has for years managed only a limited number of field trips to members' sites, but with their own site dedicated specifically to education, they can now hold almost monthly trips for members, both new



Members of Eastern Highveld Beekeepers Association placed bees at the new training apiary. Members present were Karl Demitrijevic, Paul Patrick, Peter Standish, Graham Scooby, Tsoka Chimfuti Phiri and Pete Beart (chairman).

and old.

Members are hoping that the many schools, which had expressed interest in the extracurricular activity of bee keeping before Covid, will again join them now that they have their own secure apiary. The other facilities on site mean that both formal classes and fully catered-for groups can be accommodated safely without driving far out of town.

"Many things can be taught through the use of textbooks. Bees, however, do not read the same textbooks and their 'bee-haviours' are constantly changing and surprising us. They are evolving in order to survive in a world we as humans are changing," says Beart.

Some EHBA members run training courses from the basics to advanced bee keeping, including specialised queen rearing courses.

They can now take advantage of the association's own apiary as a training venue.

Educational institutions interested in learning more about both beekeeping theory and practical field trips, or primary or senior school bee keeping activities, can contact the EHBA chairman on 063 689 3700. 🌿

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## Plot business: Guidelines and pitfalls

A smallholder with an expanse of land can consider various ways in which to use the land to make money. Whether this is your primary source of income or a secondary income stream, there will be a number of factors to consider before you start your journey.

We previously (*Smallholder* April 2023) covered making money off various ways of growing things: livestock, crops, fish etc.

Next, we take a look at some non-agricultural pursuits. Depending on what kind of business you choose to run, the factors that will determine your success will differ.

These factors are over and above the basic inputs costs, set up costs, marketing and advertising, staffing, etc that you will need to consider when starting any business, all of which will differ according to what type of business you run.

### Accommodation and Hospitality

With domestic travel continuing to be a popular

### A continuation of our series on running a business on your plot

choice for many South Africans, and activities such as destination weddings, bridal events, conferences back in full swing after Covid, you may consider turning your plot, or parts of it, into accommodation facilities of some sort.

This could take the form of small, self-catering cottages, Airbnbs, a full-board guesthouse, dormitories for school tours and team-building events, or a conference centre. Regardless of what style of accommodation and how fancy you choose to make it, there are basics to consider.

Along the same lines, you might be interested in setting up a restaurant or coffee shop. Similar to an accommodation establishment, you will need to assess the viability of this project according to factors that a crop farmer or egg business won't need to consider.

❑ Location: Smallholdings are often ideal for this sort of thing, being peri-urban. This means chances are that you are close enough to a town centre or suburban area to make travel-time to and fro not too long. Plus, this means you should have access to at least

Continued on page 7

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From page 5

basic shops and a petrol station relatively close by. But, along with location you need also to consider the state of your access roads. Some areas of smallholdings have sadly deteriorated to such an



Monitor the quality of roads around you.

extent that ordinary sedan or hatchback vehicles will find the roads impassable. Unless your establishment is marketed as "rugged terrain", it is not feasible

to call yourselves a destination for all if your roads are not usable by sedan vehicles.

❑ **Permits:** Depending on the size of the establishment you set up, you will need building permits along with business rights. It is also recommended you join a tourism and hospitality organisation such as the Federated Hospitality Association of SA (Fedhasa) and the Tourism Grading Council. Liquor licenses are also important and can take longer than expected to be finalised, so you must factor that into your timeline when starting out. And, of course,

establishments preparing and selling foodstuffs need to adhere to strict health and safety protocols.

❑ **Water and electricity:** While some types of businesses can get away with storing unpotable water, an accommodation or restaurant establishment must ensure a constant supply of clean drinking water, as well as water to maintain hygiene and cleanliness in your facilities. It is also recommended you investigate back-up power solutions so that your guests are never without electricity. South Africans might be accustomed to a two hour outage daily for load shedding but if you are after an international clientele, it will be more difficult to explain to them why they can't boil their kettle at random times each day.

Your kitchen must be built in a way that load shedding does not shut it down – gas stoves, open fires etc are the obvious solutions but you must also consider things like what happens to your extractor fans and access to hot water.

## Kennels, Stables & Equestrian Businesses

This continues to be a popular option for making money on your property and, with the large-scale development of security complexes and apartments buildings, you can add dog parks to this niche as well.

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From page 7

☐ **Location:** There is no doubt that kennels have been popular on plots for decades because of the space in relation to the relative closeness to town. It is not too much of an upheaval for a townie to drive to the plots to drop off their dogs for the Easter week-end. But, as with other townie-geared plot businesses, you must consider the state of your roads for people not in bakkies. This will also be a factor for horse boxes and the transport of your horses. Stable yards have also been popular to run on plots for decades, again because of their proximity to the townie-riders.

☐ **Noise:** First, look into your by-laws on noise in your area, particularly for dog kennels, to make sure you are not breaking any laws. Then also consider generally the location at which you build the kennels in relation to your neighbours. Try as much as possible to build away from homes and offices.

☐ **Waste management:** Stable yards tend to produce large amounts of manure, with the concomitant possibility of flies. Make sure you have the means to deal with this. This can be a designated area (larger than you think) to start a compost heap, or you can contract out to a waste removal company once a week. Or, this could form a second stream of revenue in the sale of the manure.



Stables tend to produce a large amount of waste and manure.

## Hosting Events

Given the space on a smallholding, one could consider becoming a location for outdoor events. This could include concerts, rallies, markets, horse and dog shows, trail running and others.

☐ **By-laws and permits:** Most important will be to



For big events, ensure you have enough space for parking. make sure you are not breaking any laws by hosting large numbers of people on your property. Your by-laws on noise will also be important.

You will likely need to apply for certain permits, depending on the type and size of your event, and especially if you need to close any roads. Plan well in advance to ensure all your paperwork is correct and up to date.

☐ **Parking and traffic control:** If the majority of your land will be taken up by the event itself, you will come short on providing parking for your visitors. Make sure you have allocated adequate space for parking – you might even get your neighbours onboard and use their fields. Security here will also be something to consider. Where possible, create a throughfare in your parking lot to allow simple entrance and exit.

Plans must be made to avoid creating major traffic delays in your area, both for your neighbours and the visitors themselves. Check in with your local policing authority, they are often required to assist with traffic control for large events.

☐ **Water, waste and sewerage:** Check the number of toilets you will require to service your visitors, and then add some. You can hire portable toilets so check in with those service providers regarding the requirements to prevent leakage and blockages.

Waste in terms of rubbish and recycling will be a large issue to deal with. Ensure adequate rubbish bins during your event and efficient disposal of the rubbish after the event to prevent any lingering smells or pest problems. 🌿

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## Aquaponics is saving KZN communities

While doing a university community outreach project, Luvo Gugwana of KwaZulu Natal identified the need to find solutions to the issue of food security in rural KZN communities. He, a Bachelor of Science student at the time, recognised that land, availability of water and access to agricultural inputs were the major obstacles for rural communities to grow their own food.

It was then, in 2018, that Green Arch Innovations was born. Using specially designed aquaponics systems, communities are now able to grow their own vegetables and fish, both for their own consumption and for sale.



Luvo Gugwana inspects some of the crops in one of Green Arch Innovations' aquaponics micro franchises.

Gugwana explains, "We use a micro franchise model in which communities, usually through co-operatives, can purchase or have sponsored an aquaponics system." He says this means that factors that affected agricultural pursuits in these communities before can be mitigated. "Through these systems, the communities are able to grow crops year-round."

Having grown up in a rural area himself, Gugwana recognised the challenges and struggles that come

with having limited access to resources. "It was all from observed experience. I knew the challenges we faced in my own community."

The organisation runs its micro franchises in two ways. In some

cases, the franchises are owned outright by the co-ops, having been either bought by themselves or sponsored for them. Green Arch Innovations assists in the setting up, training and maintenance of the project for the first six months to ensure the co-ops and surrounding communities are empowered to successfully manage the system thereafter. "We help them by providing the initial inputs, the fingerlings, seedlings, fish food and so on. And, if necessary, we are able to help them further down the line if they need it," says Gugwana.

The second model works off a co-ownership basis, where the co-ops and Green Arch Innovations co-own the system. "This is set up similar to a joint venture," says Gugwana.

The micro franchise systems range in size from 2 000 to 6 000 fish. They grow a variety of vegetables including many different types of leafy greens, tomatoes and peppers. Each franchise harvests for itself, and is also able to sell to their greater community, generating income for those working on the project. "We are also currently in discussions with a Spar and other retail stores in the area to allow our franchises to pool their produce together to sell to the Spar," Gugwana says. Green Arch Innovations has also provided assistance and training to the co-ops in finding and accessing suitable markets for their produce. With many parts of KwaZulu Natal comprising traditionally-fish eating communities, the introduction of tilapia in these communities has been

Continued on page 13



Aerial view of one of Green Arch Innovations' three systems.

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# Reversible egg trays could be a game-changer

**S**mall-scale poultry farmers, smallholders and even hobbyists often face challenges producing good quality eggs, free from soiling and protected from rodents. These farmers will benefit from offering their free range laying hens a hygienic, fully-enclosed laying nestbox. This is now available from local equipment manufacturer Jacobs Agri.

The standard sized nestbox is suitable for up to 45-50 layer hens, while a smaller unit is also available for hobbyists and backyard poultry keepers. This smaller unit can accommodate the needs of about 25 chickens, says Jacobs Agri owner David Jacobs. Multiple units will, of course, be able to cater for potentially any number of hens, and they can be

bought separately and then added as required as the poultry operation expands.

Made of galvanised sheet steel with a weldmesh floor, the boxes collect the freshly laid eggs in a covered tray that can be positioned either on the front of the house or at the rear, depending on the poultry-keeper's preference.

In a multi-unit set up the boxes can be positioned back-to-back in the centre of the hen house, with the egg trays set in front of the boxes.

Or, says Jacobs, with the egg trays to the rear, the boxes can be positioned in single rows on either side of the hen house. A fenced-off walkway can be

Continued on page 16

## SMART SMALLHOLDERS

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a success. Gugwana says the systems are an excellent alternative to fishing in the rivers or ocean, many of which are overfished and polluted.



Produce growing (left) and packaged, ready for sale, including whole tilapia (right).

Following the initial success of the project, Green Arch Innovations was also bolstered when, in 2022, it won the Engen Pitch and Polish competition. Out of this, Gugwana has received mentorship in business which he says has been a huge help. He has been given guidance in terms of accounting and financial management, marketing and how to increase sales. The competition also included a cash prize which Gugwana has put towards introducing data tracking systems in each franchise. This allows him to monitor the health of each franchise, water quality, tempera-

ture, outputs and yields, and so on from his phone. "So we can troubleshoot problems immediately and provide the assistance to the communities right away."

To overcome issues of load shedding and unstable electricity, the Green Arch Innovations systems are specially designed using gravity to help filter the water, rather than using costly pumps. "We have small pumps that can be run for one or two hours a day but the systems are largely gravity-fed," says Gugwana.

Ultimately, Gugwana hopes that Green Arch Innovations can expand further into KZN and then into South Africa. "We want to replicate these models outside of KZN because we have seen that there is potential in a simple but effective system that provides food and income for people who otherwise have neither." Gugwana also explains that his systems are very easily adaptable, perfect for a world grappling with climate variables and climate change. "Our systems create sustainable business with minimal impact on the environment, and they can be adapted to suit any situation."

He concludes, "This is an untapped opportunity to help our communities and we are excited by the possibilities." For more information contact Gugwana on 065 993 8474. 🌱

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9.6mm	x	9.6mm	0.90mm
13mm	x	13mm	1.00mm
13mm	x	13mm	1.20mm
13mm	x	25mm	1.00mm
13mm	x	25mm	1.25mm
13mm	x	25mm	1.50mm
13mm	x	25mm	1.60mm
13mm	x	25mm	2.00mm
25mm	x	25mm	1.60mm
25mm	x	25mm	2.00mm
25mm	x	50mm	1.50mm
25mm	x	50mm	1.60mm
25mm	x	50mm	2.00mm

**GALVANISED BEFORE WELDING**

BLOCK SIZE		WIRE DIA	
cm	x	cm	in mm
13mm	x	13mm	1.60mm
13mm	x	25mm	1.60mm
25mm	x	50mm	2.00mm
25mm	x	50mm	2.50mm
25mm	x	50mm	3.00mm
50mm	x	50mm	1.60mm
50mm	x	50mm	2.00mm
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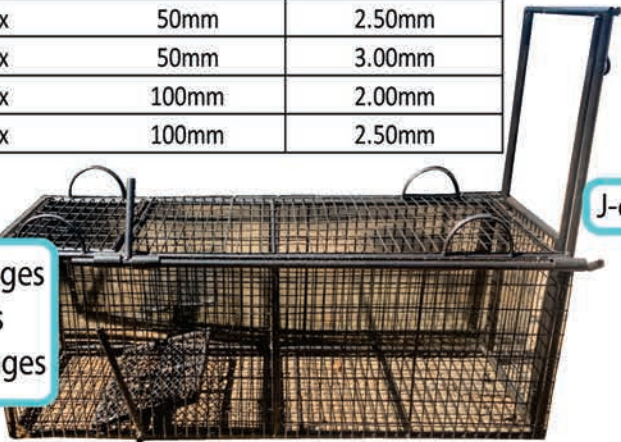


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# POULTRY

From page 13

installed behind each row, so that the egg collector can remove the eggs from each box without having to step through the chickens, their droppings and litter. Access to the interior of the box is through a curtain of PVC coated canvas flaps, which are easily parted as the hens move in or out, but which ensure that the interior of the box is invitingly dark ~ the ideal environment for a laying hen. As soon as the egg is laid, it rolls gently down the lightly sloping floor, out of the laying chamber and into the egg collection tray. Thus, it is protected from soiling, or from cracking and breakage by hens moving around in the chamber, and thus also from hens cracking and eating their eggs. The egg collection tray is covered by a hinged lid made from galvanised steel, which protects the eggs before they are collected, but which allows easy access to the collector when laying has ceased for the day.

No bedding is used in the laying chamber and the entire structure is easily cleaned.

The standard size unit measures 1,2m wide, 500mm high and 600mm deep including the floor, while the smaller size for 25 hens is 600mm wide.

The units can be placed on the floor of the hen house, or can be supplied with adjustable steel legs.

Although a laying box only 1,2m wide would seem small for the needs of 50 chickens, Jacobs points out that they are not all in the



Egg tray, pictured bottom, can be removed and mounted on the rear of the house.

house at the same time. In fact, he observes, hens lay in the same position each time. If a hen enters the laying chamber to find her space occupied, she will wait until the earlier hen has completed her laying and leaves before entering to lay her egg.

These nest boxes can be flat packed upon customers request for long distance delivery, saving on transport cost. Up to ten nest boxes can be flat packed onto one wooden pallet. Spares for the nest boxes are also available.

Jacobs Agri also manufactures a small mobile coop for backyard and hobby keepers with only a few chickens. For more information call David Jacobs on 064 752 6125 or email [d.leeuwpan@gmail.com](mailto:d.leeuwpan@gmail.com). 🌿

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# IN THE GARDEN

## There's more to spinach than you think

Leaf vegetables are an important part of the human diet, and in South Africa leafy green vegetables that are boiled or fried are commonly known as "Marog", a Sotho name that can be applied to plants of many, unrelated species that can be cultivated or harvested from the wild, says Jason Sampson, curator of the Manie van der Schyff Herbarium at the University of Pretoria.

"While marogo as a concept can include both Swiss Chard (the plant most commonly called "spinach" in South African English) and common weeds such as black-jack, which requires much boiling with water changes to remove bitterness, here is a short selection of lesser known spinach substitutes that I have personally grown and found to be productive, tasty and nutritious," he says.

Many of these will make great spinach substitutes for the smallholder grower.

❑ Spinach ~ "True" spinach (*Spinacea oleracea*) is a cool weather crop from the Northern Hemisphere, and, while it is grown in South Africa (and commonly sold under the name "baby spinach") it is less productive, with a shorter growing season, than Swiss Chard, which are the large leaves one buys at the greengrocer or grows in one's own vegetable garden. In recent years a number of different cultivars with red, yellow and silver stalks have been released to gardeners. These are pretty and allow one to grow the vegetable in more traditional garden settings. This cultivar of the common beetroot is, of course, well known and grown by most.

But there are myriad plants with leaves that can be considered edible with greater or lesser degrees of processing. An example of this would be common

**Another in our series of articles on "orphan" and unusual crop species, courtesy of the University of Pretoria horticulturalist Jason Sampson.**

Cassava, the leaves of which can be used as a spinach after a large amount of pounding and boiling.

So one needs to look deeper at easy to grow, indigenous or introduced plants that produce a tasty and nutritious cooked leaf vegetable with the minimum of processing. Luckily in South Africa we have the variety available, and the right climate, to grow some of the best.

❑ Amaranthus ~ This is the plant most commonly thought of when people discuss marogo. They are a common weed in disturbed ground countrywide, growing in Spring and Summer. Belonging to the genus Amaranthus, there are a few varieties collected from the veld. The ones best suited for cultivation are *A. cruentus* (which occurs in two varieties) and *A. tricolor*.

*A. cruentus* is grown and harvested all over Africa, and is a tall (to 2m) plant with either red or green leaves. If the plant has red leaves only the new growth is considered good for harvesting, the older

Continued on page 19

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leaves are used as fodder and the plant is known as "pig marogo". The green leafed variety is available commercially in packet seed, and all leaves including the mature leaves are sweet, prolific and very nutritious.

A. tricolor looks similar to the green leaved version of *A. Cruentus*, but usually has a red spot in the middle of the leaf. Commonly grown as a vegetable in the East, it can also be found as ornamental (but still edible) cultivars commercially.

Seeds grow easily and fast in broken soil in full sun. They enjoy organic matter, particularly rotted manure.

❑ Beach Spinach (including New Zealand Spinach) ~ This genus of beach-adapted plants occurs essentially worldwide in the warmer climates. We have a few indigenous species that are harvested in the wild by those in the know, but the commercially available (as packet seed or growing plants) is the Australian species *Tetragonia tetragonioides*.

This fast-growing groundcover looks a lot like a true spinach although it is actually in the same family as



NZ spinach in the author's garden. Tough, fast growing and productive.

the succulent 'vygies' one associates with gorgeous flowers on the rockery in spring. The plant thrives in full sun, and makes a huge amount of seed. In fact, if you have grown a patch of beach spinach in a space, that space is best left to the plant as the seed will come up for years even if you remove the plants.

The leaves are

palatable, but better when mixed with another spinach variant to add some depth to the flavour. The plant produces so much foliage it also makes a great fodder for animals. It is evergreen and grows year round in all but the coldest, driest areas, where it can be counted on to come back from seed in summer.

❑ Malabar and Ceylon Spinach ~ These small creepers are grown in truly tropical countries where true spinach and even Swiss Chard are out of the question due to the climate. They are adaptable and productive. Both belong to the same species, *Basella alba*, a semi-succulent plant with large leaves and small, black berries that



Ceylon spinach with fruit. Image: Maryke Swart.

can be squeezed to make a dark purple dye.

Ceylon spinach leaves and stems are green, Malabar spinach stems and older leaves are reddish in colour. Both are easy and fast growing in summer, and tend to self-seed under the right conditions.

As with beach spinach, mixing this with another spinach deepens the flavour of this spinach if it is being used as a dish on its own.

The plants are available from selected nurseries, and are becoming more commonly available.

❑ Chayamansa or Chaya, the tree spinach ~ Although this plant is not newly introduced into South Africa, it has been somewhat obscure. This is a real pity as it should be grown in any area that has the correct climate for it, as it is not only tasty, extremely productive and fast growing, it is also one of the most nutritious leaf vegetables on the planet - in some ways more nutritious even than Moringa (see the *SA Smallholder*, April 2023).

Continued on page 20

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# FIRE MANAGEMENT

## Fire season starts now: Are you ready?

**O**n the Highveld and in other parts of the country the winter fire season is now well and truly upon us, and reasonable rains through the summer just past have ensured good growth for veld and bush alike.

Consequently, landowners and occupiers should be extra-diligent in ensuring they have adequate measures in place to prevent as far as possible catastrophic runaway fires by preparing their fields through cutting and removing their grass, and by burning, ploughing or scraping adequate firebreaks. Other measures include ensuring the grass and vegetation on the roadsides outside their properties

## IN THE GARDEN

From page 19

As its common name indicates, this is a large shrub to small tree. Hailing from the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, this plant is grown worldwide and promoted by many NGOs and welfare organisations internationally as a “malnutrition buster”, adding value to any diet that includes it.

Some of the nutritional value touted for this species include, in one 100g cooked serving, as much protein as an egg, more calcium than any other vegetable, two times the iron of true spinach (Popeye eat your heart out...), Vitamins A, C and B, as well as folic acid and other micronutrients in appreciable amounts. (Source: Miracles in Action: Growing Chaya ~ one of the fastest, easiest foods to grow!

[https://miraclesinaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Chaya\\_broch\\_eng\\_r2.pdf](https://miraclesinaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Chaya_broch_eng_r2.pdf)

“The tree is fast growing, drought resistant and the leaves very tasty, in fact by far the best tasting spinach substitute I have grown and I have two trees in my own food forest,” says Sampson.

Stalks of the leaf are best removed before cooking,

are prepared by cutting, and by removing and storing any equipment or infrastructure that may be destroyed in a fire, or at least by preparing a fireproof “cordon sanitaire” around it.

Along with these preparatory measures, however, is the need to ensure that any items to be used in emergencies, such as sprayers, pumps, water carts, hoses and firebeaters are readily to hand and in sound working condition, so that they can be deployed without delay in the event of a fire.

Equipment is, of course, worthless if the people designated to operate it don't know how, and one's efforts at even the simplest fire control exercise will

Continued on page 21

and the leaves can be used boiled, fried, in soups, or as a sun-dried powder added to food such as smoothies to increase nutrient density. It is not fond of cold, but can be cultivated in a pot and moved under protection in colder areas. Being a relative of Cassava the leaves contain anti-nutrition factors that require cooking or sun drying to remove, but on the plus side this means that the tree does not suffer from many pests. Due to its high protein and nutrient content, dry leaves can be used very effectively in chicken or pig feeds in particular. You can harvest 50% of the leaves on the plant at any one time monthly without affecting its performance, which on a large tree is a huge amount of produce.

The plant strikes easily from cuttings taken in summer but does not set seed.

Cuttings and rooted plants are available from selected nurseries and internet vendors, particularly in spring and summer.

For more information on this, or other orphan crops, contact Jason Sampson at [jason.sampson@up.ac.za](mailto:jason.sampson@up.ac.za). 🌿



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## Try a blower for fire control

A few years ago the suggestion that a backpack blower could be used as an effective fire control device would elicit looks of extreme skepticism or, worse, snorts of derision.

But the fact is that the development of more powerful lightweight engines and more effective air delivery technology has seen to it that big blowers have become the tools of preference for many involved in the fire prevention industry.

The downside is that the popularity of blowers as firefighting implements has surpassed the level of knowledge of those who use them, with the result that smaller capacity machines are being bought for fire duties when in reality they should be restricted to blowing leaves.



Stihl's BR 700 blower.

Another factor is that many don't make the distinction between fire fighting and fire control, the former being what one needs to do when fighting a runaway fire in unprepared veld and often in less than ideal weather, while the latter is what one does when preparing firebreaks on prepared ground in ideal weather.

Another factor in the blower equation is that fire control units have extra long delivery nozzles, allowing the user to direct the most powerful stream of air precisely where it is required at maximum velocity, while remaining as far from the heat and smoke as possible. Smaller blowers are not fitted with these extra long nozzles and to avoid being scorched the user will tend to stand too far from the face of the flames, with the result that the air emitted by the blower becomes nothing more than a strong breeze when it reaches the fire, thereby actually promoting the blaze rather than extinguishing it.

In the same way, units developed for fire duties have specially developed air filtration to minimise the amount of dust entering the machine's carburation which would shorten the engine's life.

There is also the view that fire control blowers are

Continued on page 23

From page 20

be thwarted without everybody being made aware of the plan of action beforehand.

It also makes sense to make contact with neighbours specifically regarding their own fire prevention preparations, and to have their details available in the event of an emergency.

For example, on smaller plots it may be possible for neighbours to prepare a joint firebreak in adjacent field, so that the grazing area lost to the completed firebreak is shared, rather than being a cost to one party only.

In certain cases where fire hazards are extreme these arrangements will be formalised through the activities of a formally-constituted fire prevention association

## FIRE MANAGEMENT

for the area.

All of these factors are spelled out as part of South Africa's National Veld & Forest Fires Act, No 101 of 1998, a copy of which is to be found on our website, along with a number of articles, hints and tips on fire prevention and emergency fire management.

Failure to act, both in terms of preparation of one's land beforehand, and should an emergency arise, can result in heavy criminal penalties as well as civil claims for damages caused by one's negligence.

It is worth noting, for example, one's obligations as a land owner or occupier, to fight runaway fires, not only on one's own land but also on that of one's neighbours, to protect and save as far as possible, life and property. ❁

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## Fight fires effectively by understanding them

If you have witnessed rookie firemen being trained in the use of a fire hose you will certainly have heard the instructor say ~ over and over ~ "aim the hose at the base of the fire, not at the flames." There's a very good reason, and one which applies to all intent on extinguishing a blaze, whether it be a bonfire, a house fire or a veld fire.

That's because the presence of dancing orange flames rising into the sky is merely evidence of the process of combustion that is taking place beneath them. In other words, flames are not where the action is. The base of the fire, where the combustible material is being heated to the temperature which causes it to ignite, is where the action is.

If the process of combustion is simply the presence of sufficient heat to cause material to burst into flame, it stands to reason therefore that efforts to extinguish the fire must include some process to cool the combustible material to a temperature lower than that which causes it to ignite.

Hence, in the most conventional scenario, the presence of cooling water, usually delivered through a hose nozzle, but in more modern instances, sometimes in the form of a strong blast of cooling air from a powerful blower.

There are also other methods of course, one being to smother the fire in such a way that the process of combustion is denied one of the key ingredients

necessary, namely oxygen. This is achieved when the burning material is covered with

a slap from a firebeater, or when a bucket of sand is thrown at it.

Again, in more modern scenarios it is also achieved when everything combustible is coated with a fire-retardant substance such as foam or gel.

And, of course, a fire can't ignite if there is nothing for it to ignite with, for example when a firebreak is ploughed or burnt.

By the same token, the size of the fire will be dictated by a number of factors, of which ambient temperature, wind and the amount of combustible material are key. We have no control over ambient temperature, which is why there are often official fire warnings during a heatwave, neither can we control the presence or strength of wind.

But we can control the amount of combustible material available, by cutting and removing dry grass, and cutting and removing other vegetation, such as dry wood, brush, dead trees and fallen leaves before the fire season starts. 🌿



Fires need oxygen and combustible material to burn.

## FIRE EQUIPMENT

From page 21

single-purpose machines, suitable only for fires. The fact is that they give the user a one-stop solution for all his blowing needs. For when not in use during fire



Husqvarna's 578BTF blower.

season they can very effectively be used for any other garden of plot purpose, blowing

leaves, clearing lawns, or cleaning paving and pathways etc. This alone goes some way towards justifying their cost.

The reverse, however, does not hold true. Smaller blowers, while doing a great job around the garden, are simply not strong enough for fire duties. 🌿

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# FIRE MANAGEMENT

## Make your firefighting water “wetter”

In recent years a number of fluids, additives and gels have been developed aimed at making firefighting more efficient.

In most cases these involve diluting or mixing a specially-formulated chemical compound with water with the aim of making the water stick to the material it is being applied to more efficiently, so that ignition of the material is either prevented completely or at least diminished.

In this way the amount of fluid required to smother a patch of fire is reduced, making the contents of the sprayer tank last longer, thereby in turn requiring fewer time-wasting refills.

If buying and storing proprietary chemicals for the purpose is not your preference you can still benefit by “wetter” water with a simple combination of easily-available substances that will, if nothing else, make your backpack or pumped water supply last longer.

Here's a recipe that has been tried and tested by farmers and smallholder for decades.

To every 20 litres of water add 0,5kg of urea (a soluble granular fertilizer available from garden shops)

and 25ml of wetting agent (also available from garden shops ~ you will find it in little bottles with the foliar feeds and insecticides).

In the absence of proprietary-brand agent you can use a few drops of liquid dishwashing soap.

Mix these ingredients well with the water in your



Urea granules, a common fertiliser.

sprayer, ensuring the urea granules are totally dissolved, and away you go.

There is the added benefit that any left-over spray not consumed by the fire will act as a liquid fertilizer (urea is a nitrogen-rich compound) for the next growing season.

The mixture is damaging to rubber and piping so it cannot be mixed beforehand and stored in the appliance. But you can make a concentrated solution of urea and wetting agent in a glass bottle and keep this alongside the firefighting appliance, to be poured in and mixed at the last moment.

By the same token, once the firefighting task is completed you should empty out any remaining fluid and flush the pump and piping completely with clean water to prevent any residual mixture being allowed to damage the rubber components. 🌿

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# IN THE GARDEN

## You can grow vegetables in winter...

**W**hile some parts of South Africa are blessed with temperate climates that allow year-round vegetable growing, other parts will be hammered by cold temperatures and frost in winter, and growers in colder areas should therefore prepare their vegetables accordingly. Even so, with proper planning and preparation, it is still possible to grow a variety of vegetables during the colder months.

To begin with, growers must take into account a few environmental factors that will affect their plants during winter. First, reduced sunlight as the sun heads into the Northern hemisphere and our days get shorter. Along with this is the issue of frost and cold temperatures. There are a number of strategies that can help overcome these problems.

☐ Grow in a closed environment: A tunnel, greenhouse, shadecloth structure or grow room will help shield plants from frost, wind and cold temperatures. It will also help you control access to light.

☐ Select the right vegetables: Some vegetables require less sunlight than others. Leafy greens such as spinach and kale can grow in partial shade, whereas fruiting vegetables such as tomato and pepper require full sun to thrive.



Growing tomatoes indoors.

...just not all of them

- ☐ Use reflective surfaces: One way to increase the amount of sunlight that reaches your plants is to use reflective surfaces such as mirrors and tinfoil. These materials can help bounce sunlight on to your plants, providing them with extra light.
- ☐ Use grow lights: A more expensive option is to install grow lights in your growing area (greenhouse, tunnel, shadecloth area etc).

Continued on page 26



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# IN THE GARDEN

From page 25

❑ Provide proper soil nutrition: Adequate nutrition is essential for plant growth and development, especially during winter when sunlight is shorter. Adding organic matter to your soil, such as compost or manure, can help improve soil fertility and ensure that your plants have the necessary nutrients to grow.

❑ Use row covers: Row covers can include any lightweight material such as frost cloth or light plastic placed over your plants to protect them from frost and cold temperatures. They will help trap in heat. In some parts of the country, little to no rainfall will be an issue to overcome using irrigation and proper water management.

With these strategies in place popular winter vegetables include:

❑ Broccoli ~ Broccoli is an excellent vegetable to grow in winter. It is a cold-hardy plant that can tolerate some frost. Broccoli is also an excellent source of nutrients such as Vitamins C and K, and fibre. It prefers well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight.

❑ Cabbage ~ Cabbage can tolerate frosty conditions. It is a member of the brassica family, which includes broccoli, cauliflower and kale. Cabbage is an excellent source of Vitamin C and fibre. It can be grown in a wide range of soil types but prefers well-drained soil rich in organic matter.

❑ Cauliflower ~ Like other brassicas, cauliflower can be grown in cold temperatures. It is a source of Vitamins C and K, and antioxidants. Cauliflower prefers well-drained soil and plenty of sunlight. It can



Row covers will help retain heat.

be challenging to grow in high humidity, but in winter in most of South Africa this won't be a problem.

❑ Swiss chard ~ Often mislabelled in shops as spinach, Swiss chard is the large, curly leafed vegetable sold in bunches on every street corner and in every supermarket. It



Beetroot leaves and bulbs are edible.

is a popular leafy green that can be grown in partial sun. It is a good source of vitamins, iron and calcium. (See elsewhere in this edition for a complete discussion of many unusual varieties of "spinach".)

❑ Carrots ~ Carrots are a root vegetable that can be grown in winter. They prefer well-drained soil rich in organic matter. They can be grown in containers or directly in the ground and they are relatively easy to grow, but rows of seedlings need regular and repeated thinning out to enable the individual mature plants to reach full potential.

❑ Onions ~ A staple in most households, onions can be grown in winter. They can be grown from seed or seedlings. They are a long season vegetable, so planting now in winter will give you fresh onions in time for spring.

❑ Peas ~ Peas are a cool-season vegetable rich in protein and fibre. They are very easy and rewarding to grow and they can be trained vertically, making them ideal for smaller patches of ground. They freeze well, so a large harvest will give you peas throughout the year if dried or frozen.

❑ Radishes ~ A root vegetable that can be grown in winter. They mature quickly so they do not take up large tracts of space for the whole season.

❑ Beetroot ~ Another popular root vegetable, beetroot can be harvested for both its bulb and leaves. They are a versatile vegetable that can be boiled, roasted, pickled and more. 🌸

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# Scorpions come to light in new book

Scorpions are often described as “living fossils”, as they have been around for an astonishing 420 million years. South Africa is home to 108 species of scorpion, so a new book on them will be welcomed.

The *Field Guide to Scorpions of South Africa* by Ian Engelbrecht describes and illustrates all known species in the country.

The guide gives details of appearance, habitat and behaviour, and discusses the variations within species according to region.

There are up-to-date distribution maps for all species.

The photographs are exceptional, carefully worked to show astounding detail and vivid colours, bringing to life the intricate patterning and colours of different species.

Both males and females are presented, as well as a variety of colour forms, facilitating accurate identification in the field.

This is an invaluable tool for students, researchers, academics, hikers and anyone with an interest in South Africa's rich and fascinating fauna.

It is published by Penguin Random House and the recommended price is R400. 🌿

## APPS

# App lets you learn what lurks unseen on your plot

Occasionally, when you are walking around your smallholding, you might come across footprints of an unknown animal or some droppings that you can't identify. Luckily for you there is now an app that you can download to your smartphone, which will help you to identify your uninvited visitor.

Stuarts' Tracks & Scats of Southern Africa App is based on the book by Chris and Mathilde Stuart, *Stuarts' Field Guide to the Tracks & Signs of Southern, Central & East African Wildlife*. It covers the tracks and scat of mammals, birds and reptiles from South Africa all the way north to Zambia.

Readers can refer to highly accurate track and scat drawings, detailed species descriptions, multiple photographs and videos which give a comprehensive

visual account of each animal's tracks and signs.

Students, scientists and nature lovers generally will find the app easy to navigate. They can also search according to region. The app covers both commonly found and more retiring species.

Download the app from Google Play and the Apple App Store. 🌿

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Screenshots from the app.

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**Date:** 22 to 26 May, 2023

**Location:** Agricultural Research Council (ARC) Irene Campus, Pretoria.

**Cost:** R3 200.

**Contact:** Mpho Makhanya on [makhanyam@arc.agric.za](mailto:makhanyam@arc.agric.za)

## Royal Show

Africa's largest mixed agricultural show. This annual ten-day event is well-known for including showings of livestock and agricultural equipment, but also for a wide range of other displays and activities, encompassing lifestyle exhibitions, music concerts and even a funfair, along with over 240 exhibitors ranging from arts and crafts, agricultural pursuits, livestock and more. The Sheep and Wool Expo is always a special highlight of the Royal Show and the Royal Show Honey Hall is utilised by bee farmers nationally to not only display their produce but also as an educational facility. A number of other agricultural and breed-specific societies will have stands and displays throughout the event.

**Date:** 26 May to 4 June, 2023

**Location:** Royal Show Grounds, Howick Road, Pietermaritzburg

**Cost:** Day passes: R80 for adults, R50 for pensioners

**Contact:** To buy tickets and for more info visit [www.royalshow.co.za](http://www.royalshow.co.za)

## The Cannabis Expo, Durban

The Cannabis Expo is the global marketplace for

education and innovative products and businesses serving the cannabis industry and its medicinal, agricultural, financial and lifestyle aspects. The expo hall at The Cannabis Expo will feature over 100 exhibitors representing the full spectrum of the cannabis industry. Browse and enjoy cannabis-infused meals, treats and drinks. The event will also feature a vibrant outdoor festival environment. Presentations around cannabis-related topics that cover health, agriculture, legislation, finance and more will also be held throughout the expo.

**Date:** 28 to 30 July, 2023

**Location:** The Globe at Suncoast, Durban

**Contact:** Visit [www.thecannabisexpo.co.za](http://www.thecannabisexpo.co.za) for more info or contact [sarah@thecannabisexpo.co.za](mailto:sarah@thecannabisexpo.co.za)

## AVI Africa Poultry Expo

Africa's biggest poultry conference and exhibition is back after a three-year break. The expo brings together all major players in the poultry industry, from large and small owner producers and suppliers, through to key decision makers from big corporations. AVI Africa 2023 will showcase the latest in products, techniques and services aimed at enhancing business and maximising the profits of commercial poultry enterprises. Producers of chicks, eggs or broilers, from the commercial and the emerging market sector alike find great benefit from the conference.

**Date:** 6 to 8 June, 2023

**Location:** Emperor's Palace, Kempton Park

**Cost:** R700 per day, which includes access to all talks and exhibits, lunch, tea and snacks.

**Contact:** Visit [www.sapoultry.co.za](http://www.sapoultry.co.za) to download your registration form or email [aviafrica@sapoultry.co.za](mailto:aviafrica@sapoultry.co.za)



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## Mzansi: A laugh a minute

**H**ow do you establish whether the vehicle you have just stolen is fitted with a tracking device, without digging around in or under the vehicle to find it?

Simple. You park it in a police station staff carpark for a couple of weeks.

At least that's what a thief did last month when he parked a smart white Hilux in the staff parking ground at the Benoni SAPS and left it. Only after a couple of weeks did a curious cop notice that it hadn't moved, and started asking his colleagues if it was theirs. Which of course it wasn't.

So the cop asked a visitor to the station, a man from a nearby vehicle tracking company who happened to be at the station reporting another stolen vehicle, for help. He quickly saw that the bakkie's number plates had been obscured by stuck-on fake plates which, when run through the stolen vehicle database, revealed they were from an unrelated vehicle. If this comedy of errors doesn't take the cake itself, a positively Orwellian bit of spin-doctoring by the station's spokesperson must, when she was reported as saying "this incident has once again proven how brazen criminals can be, using law enforcement property to store their loot".

Um, no. It actually shows how useless the police have become, firstly if they don't even ensure tight security over their own property, and secondly if it takes a visiting civilian rather than a cop to ascertain that the vehicle had been stolen.

But wait. There's more.

You may remember another recent WTF escapade in Nelspruit when, one morning, drivers' licence testing stations were closed for business by the station examiners. They were protesting that driving instructors in the area were refusing to pay the increase in the amount of the bribe required by the examiners to ensure that the learner drivers passed their tests. Not,

please note, that they were refusing to pay the bribe itself, but rather the increase in the bribe.

And then, of course, there is the case of Thabo Bester, the convicted rapist, murderer and all-round Mister Slick. He contrived, with the help of a few crooked prison staff and his pretty "celebrity" doctor girlfriend, to fake his own death by burning in his cell. He then escaped from Bloemfontein Prison and spent nearly a year living high on the hog with said girlfriend in Joburg before doing a runner.

He got as far as Tanzania (at least two border crossings away) with his moll before he was rearrested and brought back to face the music. It's the sort of story that would make a wonderful Hollywood movie, complete with Mister Plod the fuzz, Colombo the bumbling private eye and a cast of a thousand village idiots.

Meanwhile, you'll be pleased to know that our international-airport-that-has-never-hosted-an-international-flight, the multimillion rand apartheid-era airport at Bisho in the Eastern Cape, has been tarted up. And it recently came into its own, courtesy of the president of Saudi Arabia. He has apparently bought a big game farm nearby and used the airport as his personal landing strip to fly in a large party of guests, equipment, vehicles and comestibles, with which to enjoy a lavish hunting holiday.

Although considering the party reportedly included a plane-load of pretty girls (housed separately from the main party) one can only speculate on the kind of hunting that was done.

Yes, dear reader, Mzansi is a laugh-a-minute and you can't make this stuff up. This is why I love it here.



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