

WINTER 2006

A quarterly newsletter for, and about, the people with their hands in the soil

In this edition...

- **What to plant** for a Winter and early Spring harvest
- **How to Grow ... leeks**
- **News and Inspiration**
- **Ways to be Water Wise:** Start a sprout farm
- **Bug Watch:** 'Ecowarriors'
- **Tips for more successful (and cheaper) gardening:** Easier row planting; woody cuttings
- **Exercises for gardeners**
- **Don't Waste:** Electricity
- **Recipes for the Home Gardener:** Vichyssoise; using the wonder box

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SOIL FOR LIFE

Build the soil, grow the plants, feed the people, heal the planet.

NEWSLETTER No. 8

Winter

Whenever you feel that life is getting the better of you, think of this story and you'll realise that all the trials and tribulations of life have come to test you.

Shake it off, and take a step up!

"One day a farmer's donkey fell into a well. The animal cried for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. But he couldn't come up with a plan to save his friend. Finally he decided that since the animal was old and the well needed to be covered anyway, it was just not worth trying to retrieve the donkey. He invited the whole neighbourhood over to help him. They all grabbed spades and started to shovel dirt into the well.

At first the donkey realised what was happening and cried horribly. Then to everyone's amazement he quietened down. They continued to shovel and eventually the farmer looked into the well and was surprised by what he saw.

After every shovel of dirt hit the donkey's back the donkey did something amazing. He

shook it off and took a step up. As the farmer's neighbours continued to shovel dirt on the donkey, he continued to step upwards. It wasn't long before the neighbours received a big surprise. The donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off into the fields.

Life is going to shovel dirt on you; all kinds of dirt. The trick is to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of your troubles is a stepping stone. We can climb out of the deepest well by never giving up, and turning our problems into opportunities for a better life. "

(Storyteller—unknown)



In this edition:

- Read the stories in the News and Inspiration column of the people who are making a difference in their neighbourhoods.
- Find out about the tiny wasps that will control the cabbage white butterfly population in your veggie patch. No need to use poisons when nature does the job for you.
- Diarise the Spring weekend workshop at the Soil for Life Resource Centre. Phone Sheila and book your place.
- Most of all, enjoy the read, and write in and share your ideas with us.

Pat

PLANT YOUR GARDEN FOR A WINTER AND SPRING HARVEST

This planting guide is for areas in the Western Cape.

Remember to plant seeds early – the growing season in the winter rainfall areas is short.

What Seeds to Sow: June

Winter rainfall areas: Beetroot, broad beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, kohlrabi, lucerne, parsley, peas, radish, soya beans, spinach, sunflowers, turnips.

Summer rainfall areas: Beetroot, broad beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, CM kale, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, Lucerne, onion, peas, radish, spinach, turnip.

What seeds to sow: July

Winter rainfall areas: Beetroot, cabbage, carrot, lettuce, parsley, peas, radish, tomato, turnips

Summer rainfall areas: Peas, Swiss chard spinach.

What seeds to sow: August

Winter rainfall areas: Basil, beetroot, brinjal, cabbage, carrot, chillies, chives, coriander (dhanya), dill, green pepper, kohlrabi, leaf mustard, leeks, lettuce, Lucerne, marrows, mealies, parsley, pumpkins, radish, Swiss chard spinach, squash, sunflowers, sweetcorn, thyme, tomatoes, turnip, watercress.

Summer rainfall areas: Beetroot, cabbage, carrot, kohlrabi, leek, leaf mustard, lettuce, Lucerne, peas, radish, Swiss Chard Spinach, tomato, turnip.

Seeds for most of these vegetables are available at R2.50 a packet (plus postage) for Soil for Life members.

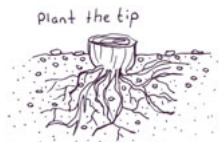
Remember to save seed from your winter crops for planting next year.

How to grow...

LEEKS



Did you know that every time you buy a bunch of leeks you are getting two bunches for the price of one?



Simply cut off the root tip of the leek and plant it. Cover with a cut off clear plastic bottle for a few days to keep it warm and damp. Soon you will notice it is starting to grow small green leaves, and within two months you'll have a fine new leek to eat. Replanting a tip to produce a *third* leek doesn't work; it will either rot, or go

straight to seed.

Leeks are one of the great survivors in the winter garden—very hardy and extending from early autumn to late spring.

They make a tasty addition to soups and stews, yet many people don't grow them because they don't know them. Cold potato and leek soup (called *Vichyssoise* by the French) is a very popular dish. Try out the recipe in the recipe section of this newsletter when the weather starts warming up in September.

Not only are leeks sweeter and milder than onions, but they are much easier to digest. They can be grown amongst your other vegetables to repel insect pests (although beans and cabbages don't like them as neighbours), and they are very easy to grow. They have no serious problems with pests and diseases.

Plant seed in autumn, or else through August till mid-September. The seedlings are very small, so make sure you mulch the soil lightly to prevent weeds from crowding them. And don't mix the new leeks growing from old tips with those that are growing from seed.

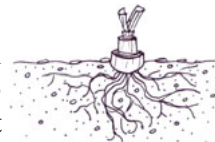
If you want your leeks to be white (or blanched), plant them in a 20cm deep trench and carefully add soil round them as they grow to keep the light away from them. Light is what makes them turn green.

Alternatively put a cardboard collar or a length of plastic piping around the plant and, ideally gently drop soil into this. But be very careful not to get soil between the leaves otherwise you end up eating gritty leeks. Do **not** cover the leaves. All this trouble, however, makes no difference to the taste. Un-blanched, they taste just as good as blanched.

Leeks are **heavy feeders** so add well rotted manure or compost while they are growing, and give the young plants a weekly dose of liquid fertiliser.

Harvest your crop when the leeks are about 25mm across the base, although many people enjoy eating 'baby' leeks.

Let one plant go to seed at the end of its season - in its second year. It will produce a globe-shaped head of pale mauve flowers and when the seeds are ripe you can hang the flowers upside down over a paper bag, or else rub the seeds out with your hands. Store them, once they have dried out, in a cool, dark dry place.



DON'T WASTE ...

...ELECTRICITY

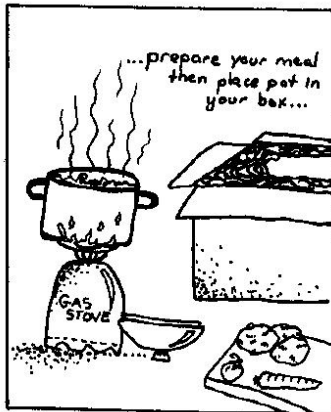
To save on electricity, use a wonder box

The wonder box (also called a hot box, or a hay box) is a type of cooker, which anyone can make using materials that are normally thrown away. Food is cooked for a short while on a stove or fire and then placed in the wonder box where it continues to cook very slowly for a long time.

Cooking in this way will save you time, effort and money. It is also a safe way to cook because it cannot cause a fire, or result in accidental burns. Food cannot boil over or burn, so pots are easier to clean.

How to make, and use, a wonder box:

1. Use a large apple box or any other cardboard box of the same size.

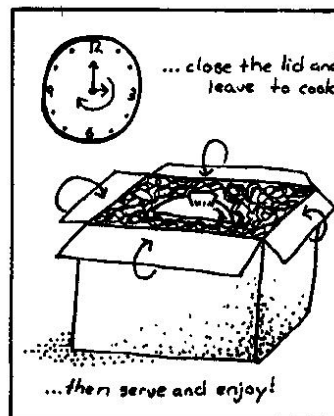
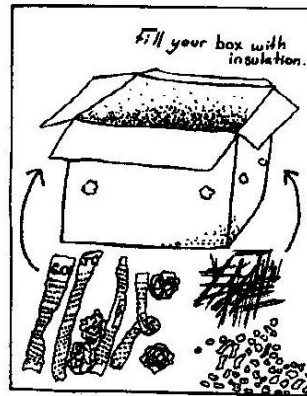


2. Line the bottom and sides of the inside of the box with newspaper and/or polystyrene trays. Make the lining about the thickness of two fingers (about 2cm).
3. Fill the box almost to the top with dry grass, clean sawdust, chipped polystyrene or newspaper balls. (You can also make cushions and fill them with these materials.)
4. Make a hollow in the centre of the wonder box that is big enough for a pot of boiling food.

5. Bring your food to the boil in a pot with short handles and a tight-fitting lid.
6. Wrap the pot in newspaper and place it in the hollow in the wonder box.
7. Cover with dry grass, sawdust or newspaper balls and the lid of the box.
8. Do not open the box until the food is cooked and ready to be served.

Follow these guidelines when using your wonder box:

- Never put luke warm food into the wonder box.



RECIPES FOR YOUR WONDER BOX

Vegetable soup

- ½ bulb of garlic, with the cloves peeled and crushed
- 2 large onions, diced
- 1 cup of chopped parsley
- 3 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 small butternut, peeled and diced
- ½ bunch carrots scrubbed, diced
- ¼ packet lentils
- 2 vegetable stock cubes dissolved in 2 litres of hot water (or use 2 litres of homemade stock—see newsletter No 6)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- A little oil

Gently sauté the onion and garlic in the oil. Add the chopped vegetables and parsley and stir to coat with oil. Add the stock and bring to the boil. Turn the stove down and simmer for 15 minutes with the lid on.

Make a nest in the cushion at the bottom of the hot box and place the pot of boiling soup in it. Cover with the second cushion. Tuck it in well and put the lid on the box.

The soup will be ready in two hours.

Cooking times:

- Dry beans—soak overnight, boil for 15 minutes and then place them in the wonder box for 4 hours.
- Samp and beans—soak overnight, boil for 15 minutes and then cook in the wonder box for 8 hours.

Tips:

- Make sure that the lids fit the pots tightly and that the pot is full. This reduces the cooking time.
- Make sure the food is boiling before putting it in the wonder box.
- Keep the pillows dry.
- Store the box in a clean dry place; not on the floor.

RECIPES

for the Home Gardener

Leeks are easy to grow and delicious to eat. They can be steamed whole or sliced, then served with melted butter or a savoury sauce; a cheesy sauce is divine. You can also use them raw and thinly sliced in salads.

Try this famous recipe (it is very simple to make and you can make it when you have plenty of leeks and freeze it for those long, hot summer days).



Vichyssoise

4 medium potatoes, peeled and sliced thinly
6 leeks, white part only, and sliced thinly
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
1 litre vegetable stock
1½ cups milk or light cream
Salt and pepper to taste
Chopped chives, or green leek leaves for garnish.

Boil the potatoes, leeks and celery in the stock for 20 minutes or until all are very tender. Either blend them in an electric blender, or push them through a fine sieve. Add milk or cream, season with salt and pepper and chill before serving. When serving sprinkle each portion with chopped chives, or green leek leaves.

Leeks have few calories, but many mineral salts such as iron, magnesium, calcium, potassium, phosphorus and sulphur. They are also rich in fibre and Vitamins A, B and C.

NEWS AND INSPIRATION

Save electricity. Save money. Save the environment.

Buy a Salathiso Hot Box.

A group of HIV positive women from Kayamandi township near Stellenbosch did a training course with Soil for Life to start their own food gardens. They were rewarded with an abundant harvest of nutritious vegetables to feed themselves and their families. As a way of cutting down on the costs of electricity to cook their food, they learnt how to make Hot Boxes (or Wonder Boxes). Not only have they saved themselves a lot of money, but they have been selling the boxes to people in their community and beyond. What started as a solution to their own needs, has become an income-generating project which provides them with the means to support their families.

They have called their group *Salathiso* and are marketing their boxes under that name. If you're interested in more information, or would like to buy a hot box from them, contact ABE Development Services at 021-683 8597 or e-mail them at abeds@sybaweb.co.za. These 'unplugged slow cookers' cost R100 each..

Women for Peace in Mfuleni are also making Hot Boxes, and you can place an order for them by phoning Mrs Margaret Gwegwe on 021-909 1662 or 072-604 1553.

Of course, you could make your own. Have a look at page 3 in the column 'Don't waste..' for ideas on how to go about it and also on how to use your hot box.

Opportunities to sell your produce

The gardeners at Caravelle Primary School, the Happy Garden, Alpha and Omega and Hazeldene Primary School (all in Mitchells Plain) sold some of their produce at the Waterfront Fresh Produce Market on the last Sunday of June. What an opportunity to make your gardens work for you. Edith Mwezo and the ladies of Masihlume Soup Kitchen in Driftsands also sold some of their jams and pickles. Trading was very fast, with virtually all the vegetables being sold in the first hour or so.

Happy Garden and Caravelle Primary School vegetables have also found an outlet through the newly opened Wellbeing Natural Medicine in Muizenberg. Magnificent heads of cauliflower and broccoli, turnips radishes, beetroot, parsley, celery and radishes adorned the wooden tables at the entrance to the shop, and 'wowed' the visitors who arrived for the opening on Saturday, 16th July.

There is an enormous demand in all communities for fresh, naturally grown food. So plan your next plantings and get seeds into the ground now. There's no time to waste. If you plan your plantings, there will always be something for you to eat, and something to sell.



WAYS TO BE WATER-WISE

Save the water from cooking your vegetables

It is full of vitamins and minerals and is excellent for your health, and for the garden. Don't pour it down the drain. Let it cool, and either:

- drink it, or add it to soups, stews and gravies or
- pour it onto your pot plants or
- water your veggie patch with it.

Start a sprout farm and a 'fast food outlet' on your kitchen windowsill (and you also won't have to water your garden)

Sprouts are the easiest-to-grow, most power-packed winter (and year-round) food.

They grow very quickly, are always fresh and are, uncontaminated by pesticides. You can eat them everyday in salads, stir fries and sandwiches, or in soups and stews, or just snack on them. They are the most economical foods and use very little water to grow. The rinsing water can be used in your garden, or added to the cooking pot.



Some seeds from your kitchen cupboard that you can sprout:

lentils, sunflower, barley, chickpeas, peas, peanuts, wheat, mung beans and alfalfa or Lucerne. You can even sprout onion and broccoli seeds, **but make sure that you never eat the seeds from the packets that you buy for planting in your garden. They may have poison on them!**



How to go about sprouting ...

- Place two tablespoons of seeds in a large, clean glass jar.
- Cover with water and leave to soak overnight.
- In the morning drain off the water and tie a piece of mesh over the top of the jar. (An old stocking or an orange mesh bag will do the job just fine). Rinse the seeds with clean water at least twice a day. You may need to put the bottle lid over the mesh covering to prevent them sprouting seeds from drying out in between rinsings.
- Keep the seeds in a warm, dark place until the tiny roots and shoots appear, and then put them in a sunny place so that the baby leaves turn bright green.
- On the fourth day, depending on how warm the weather is, the sprouts should be ready to eat.

WATERING in Winter should always be done in the morning, and certainly never later than 2.00pm.

Take note

- **Competition time** is around the corner. Soil for Life will be visiting your garden some time in early November to select the finalists for the end-of-year awards. Will your garden be one of the finalists? Have you planned your Spring planting programme?
- The **End-of Year bus tour and party** will be held on the Thursday, 16th November. Only those committed gardeners will be offered a seat on the tour bus. Will your garden group be taking part?
- Our **Annual General Meeting** will be held on Wednesday, 27th September at 9.00am. The venue will be announced in the next newsletter.
- Speak to Fabian and Sandy about any produce that you have to sell on a weekly basis. We have a lot of people who are keen to buy fresh, organic vegetables, herbs and fruit. Start expanding your garden's horizons, and grow, grow and grow. Create your own 'money tree'.
- In stock at the Soil for Life Resource Centre:
Vegetable seeds, Sunflower seeds, vetiver grass, almond trees, grape vines, Wilde als, bulbinella, rosemary, lavender, comfrey roots, pineapple sage, wild rosemary, sage and much more.
- Past copies of the newsletter are available at R5 each. Make your own reference book that you can turn to when you have problems in the garden.

Phone Sheila (021-794 4982) to order.



Annette, Frans, Pastor Carl, Nettie and Liza from Thando Community Services in Touws River showing off their new PTH water conditioner. It was a gift from Mike Armitage of the Township Trust, a UK-based charity organisation. This amazing piece of equipment literally turns 'brack' water into fresh water which can be used for irrigation, and also stimulates plant growth.



Above: Students from Chrysalis Academy watch as Mildred Nyemezi and Fabian Harms of Soil for Life demonstrate planting techniques.

Below: Thobisa Resha receives her training certificate from Mildred.. These girls were looking forward to going back to their communities to teach the skills they had learnt during the week they spent with our team. Good luck to them all. We look forward to hearing about their successes.



TIPS FOR MORE SUCCESSFUL (AND CHEAPER) GARDENING

Easier row planting

How often do you find that either you're replanting bare patches or thinning densely seeded spots in your veggie beds, simply because you haven't planted small seeds correctly? It is very difficult to sow fine seeds like lettuce and carrots evenly and quickly in a row.

To make it easier, half-fill a cup with dry soil or river sand and mix in a packet of seed. This gives enough volume to spread the seeds evenly down a row.

Now is the ideal time to make cuttings from woody plants like grape vines, rosemary, wilde als, lavender and other shrubs:

The cuttings should be about 10cm long (that is about the distance from the tip of your index finger to the knuckle) and the thickness of a pencil. They can be taken by using a sharp knife to cut just below the node (where the leaves grow from the stem) or by taking a heel cutting at the node.

To prepare or plant the cuttings:

- Carefully cut off the lower leaves, There may be two or three leaves at the top of the cutting.
- Make a hole in the soil with a pencil or stick and gently push the cutting into it. Plant so that two-thirds of the cutting are under the ground and one-third is above the ground. Plant in cartons or containers with drainage holes in the bottom. Push the soil firmly around the cutting and water it well.
- To protect the cuttings from drying out, either put the cut-off top of a plastic cooldrink bottle over them, or make a mini hothouse using the underwires from an old bra. Tie clear plastic over these. The underwires keep the plastic off the cutting.
- Put the containers in a protected place, but not in direct sunlight. Keep an eye on them.



Prepare you back and leg muscles for Spring gardening

The Winter cold keeps lots of us house-bound and so, when the warm weather arrives and we rush out into the garden, our muscles complain and we suffer all sorts of aches and pains.

Start preparing yourself now by exercising gently every day. Here are a few ideas to get those muscles loose and supple.



old this stretch for a slow count of twenty for each leg. Repeat five or six times, and slowly increase the number of stretches over a period of days to really work those muscles. Breathe deeply while you do it. This exercise will help to make your back supple. Hold

for a slow count of ten on each side.

Breathe deeply all the time.

Stretch, but always do it slowly.



BUG WATCH

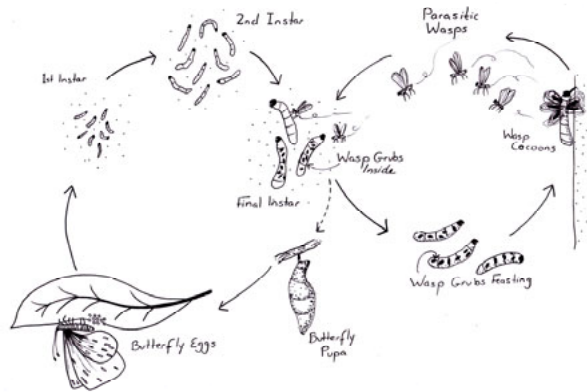
Controlling pests and diseases the natural way.

The Cabbage White butterfly (*Pieris brassicae*) is a common site in the vegetable garden and the caterpillars that hatch out of the tiny yellow eggs grow quickly and cause enormous damage to cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli plants. They can decimate whole crops in a very short space of time.

Unlike other butterflies, they don't mind either hot and cold weather, are not worried by the raging south-easters and they breed continually through the year, laying up to 125 eggs at a time. Populations increase quickly in the cold months.

You may, however, have noticed butterfly pupae attached to the wall of your house. Periodically you'll have the joy of watching the crumpled adult emerge, blow up its wings and take off into the garden. Often however, these cocoons remain intact; nothing ever comes out of them.

That is a sign that Nature is at work or, should I say, that wasps – 'ecowarriors' in the caterpillar war – are doing their job. Cabbage White butterfly populations are checked by a tiny, indigenous, parasitic wasp, *Pteromalus puparum*. The female wasp lays her eggs in the body of the final larval stage of the caterpillars and the her grubs feast on the tissues of the host. They first feast on body juices, muscles and digestive system—all the non-vital organs, as it would be unwise to kill the host before the grubs are fully developed – and attack the nervous system last of all. The caterpillar remains alive, and fresh, until just before the wasp grubs are ready to pupate and then they



start nibbling at the brain. This brings about changes in the caterpillar's behaviour and it leaves the food plant and migrates up any vertical surface in the vicinity, in a premature attempt to pupate. The wasp grubs finally kill the ailing caterpillar, and emerge to spin tiny cocoons covered in a golden nets which will protect the pupating wasp larvae from attack by other parasites. Clusters of these cocoons can often be seen on vertical structures in and around your garden and home. You would have to be very observant to notice the little black wasps that emerge from them to continue their life cycle.

Who needs poisons with allies like these?

Encourage the natural enemies to your garden by growing many different food crops and herbs and by keeping trees, shrubs and flowers growing around the boundaries. Apply organic fertilisers and loads of compost instead of nitrogen fertilisers. Experiment with different natural sprays and repellent crops. The important thing is that you try different techniques and find the best ones for your situation. In the end you will discover the best programme for managing any problems that arise in your garden.



Healthwise ...

Garlic and your health.

Sir John Harrington, in the *Englishman's Doctor* (1609) wrote:

*'Garlic then have power to save from death;
Bear with it though it make unsavoury breathe,
And scorn not garlic like some that think
It only maketh men wink and drink and stink'*

Garlic is renowned for its medicinal properties—eat it fresh everyday to keep the germs away. Apart from the fact that it is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-viral, it has also been shown to:

- Reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Control intestinal worms.
- Contain antioxidants that boost the immune system to fight cancerous cells.



Late winter to Spring is the time to start planting garlic in your garden for a late summer harvest.

Buy a bulb of garlic at the supermarket. Divide it into separate cloves and plant them about 5 cm (three finger-widths) deep, and about 20cm apart.

Each clove will give another bulb. Lift the bulbs when they are ripe (the leaves will start turning yellow and dying back), spread them on the ground to dry out a bit and then hang them in a cool dry place until you are ready to use them.

Try planting a few cloves in containers kept in a warm and sunny spot. They sprout in a few weeks and need no attention apart from watering.

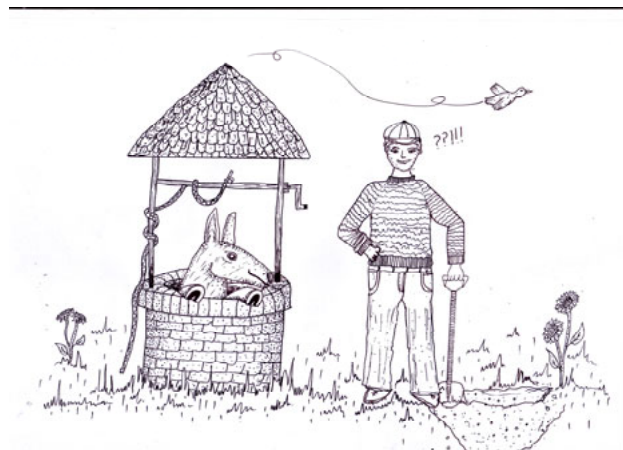
'Spring' Workshop

The next organic gardening workshop will be held at the Soil for Life Resource Centre at the Constantia Waldorf School on **Saturday, 9th and Sunday, 10th September** from 8.30am to 3.30pm on both days.

Phone Sheila on 021-794 4982 to book your place.

Cost: R500 per person (R450 for Soil for Life members).
The cost includes a booklet, herb tea, scones and home-made jam.

***Bring your own healthy lunch, a sun hat, loads of sun block and wear your old clothes.
This is a hands-on experience!***



Turn all your problems into golden opportunities