

FOOD GARDENS

Long before the seed of technological advances was planted, communities were self-sufficient and lived off what the land provided. Families would have an abundance of food from their vegetable crop and livestock. With a global concern for the future of our planet and a healthier lifestyle, a movement has begun - getting back to these basics.

The recent drive to be organic has led to responsible gardening practices. Sustainability is another hot word parting from gardener' lips! Food gardens are a great way of creating equilibrium with nature again, but also form part of a healthy living and are a very satisfying pastime.

You don't even have to have a dedicated vegetable patch; you can plant veggies in a sunny spot in between your shrubs and flowers and create an 'ornamental kitchen garden'. Even if you live in flat there is always space available for fresh greens! All that is needed is six hours of daily sunlight, outside (such as a window sill or balcony) and a love for the green goodness.

But don't forget about fruit trees when planning your food gardens. The plum tree in particular loves the Mediterranean climate of the Cape and provides great shade in a small garden. They are easy to manage, give divine blossoms and succulent fruit. The efficient pruning technique called espalier can be used in gardens where space is a problem.

The old fashioned farming method of crop rotation will benefit all veggie gardens. Plant alternate rows of vegetables: a legume crop such as peas/beans, followed with a leafy salad crop, followed with a root crop. Planting a selection of vegetables in this manner also allows for easy rotation thereof, helping prevent diseases and pests becoming a problem. If the same plant is grown in the same place every year, pests and diseases may build up in the soil. Different plants also take different nutrients from the soil, while others add nutrients.

Plant out only a few veggie plants of a variety at a time to avoid a surplus. Plan your planting at three-week intervals to ensure a steady supply of veg. Place compost on the beds when you plant, water regularly and feed with a liquid food for added growth.

If you don't care much for sowing seed, a wide range of seedlings is available at Starke Ayres Garden Centre for speedier results.