



MARTIE DU PLESSIS chatted to a Cape Town based home-schooling family about living an eco-friendly life

Growing Food and Children

In 1991 I met a young family at a home-school curriculum exhibition in Hout Bay, Cape Town. Subsequent to this meeting I have become good friends with them and visited with the four children and their parents as they moved around the country. After many moves they have finally settled back in Cape Town.

At their current home they have established an edible garden; their entire garden is one great big vegetable patch, with a house in the middle of it! Perhaps it would be better to let Wendy explain the reasons for this choice and how they got started, and of course where they believe it will lead. Wendy says, "We have always grown some form of edible food, whether it is just herbs and salads or tomatoes in pots, there was always a little something growing in the various homes we have lived in as a family for the last twenty-two years. When we finally settled, knowing that the Lord wanted us in this home permanently, we decided to plan and plant a small vegetable garden.

Being a home schooling family it was a wonderful opportunity to teach our eldest son, then 11, woodworking skills as he worked alongside his dad building raised beds, fences and gates. Fences were a necessity since we had three dogs! While the men were busy with the structures, the girls (9 and 13 respectively), started planting seeds into trays for the wonderful and expected harvest. The youngest child got away with digging and having fun. What began as one vegetable patch developed into a second, third and fourth over the next three years to an almost entirely edible garden. Being in Cape Town with its Mediterranean climate we can grow various plants all year round. This means that we are constantly sowing seed, eating produce, planting seedlings, weeding beds, and feeding the earth with home-made compost and worm tea.

In 2009 we added four chickens to the family and a coop needed to be built. Son and husband jumped into the challenge and built a movable coop which could be placed over a bed for the chickens to manure and pick over. The chickens have also grown in number over the years to ten and have moved to a palatial coop at the bottom of the garden. The manure and saw dust sweepings are still added to the compost and then to the soil and we get the benefit of fresh beautiful eggs every day. Taking care of the chickens is the youngest child's job, and at ten years of age he does a fabulous job.

When we started planting vegetables we never knew the path that the Lord would start us on – gosh, all I wanted was some wholesome organic food for the table. The closer we got to eating the food we grew the more we questioned where the rest of our food would come from. We now have sourced completely organic pasture fed beef, lamb, chicken and pork and we grow most of our own seasonal vegetables and herbs only having to buy in what we cannot grow, like fruit and other speciality items. We also have learnt how to preserve and freeze excess produce, which is always welcome especially when our forty-odd strawberry plants (planted in hanging baskets around the property) come into full production and we make strawberry jam."

I wanted to know from Wendy what her recommendations would be to an aspiring horticulturalist (read here "organic vegetable planter"). She replied, "Start small and start with the things you eat most often. Don't plant aubergines if you don't normally buy them. If you eat lots of salads, then start with just that. Get your whole family involved in the process - you need them committed if you plan to expand your growing space over the years like we did. Having a large vegetable garden is a massive time commitment and there will be crunch times like spring when the entire



family will need to hold back on other pursuits so that seeds can get into the ground!"

Lastly, I wanted to know what their gardening experience had taught them as a family. "We live on a small piece of land in a built up suburb of Cape Town," Wendy replied. "For ten years we looked for a small farm or small holding but every door we tried to open was shut. When we eventually conceded that it was not the Lord's will for us to live on a farm, He opened our eyes to the possibilities right on our doorstep such as that we could grow our own food and live a simple, eco-friendly life right where we were.

The second thing is that learning the skill of growing food together as a family is a generational blessing that we will pass on down to our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. When the world around us is starting to rely more and more on unethical and chemical based farming methods, we have a choice if we are prepared to dig in (pardon the pun!) and grow whatever we can, where we can." ▾

RESOURCES

For further information about what this family is doing in the vegetable garden, in the kitchen or being wise stewards of what the Lord has called them to, Google "Urban Homestead South Africa" or type in the following URL: <http://its-our-life-for-six.blogspot.com/>

Wendy Young and her friend, Shirley, developed a home-schooling curriculum to discover the country of South Africa in a more hands-on, fun way using South African children's literature and real life learning. Any family can purchase it at www.south-african-homeschool-curriculum.com

Dynamis is operated from Clarens and is a nation-wide ministry to equip families and home educators. Dynamis does family consultations to determine what curriculum will work best for the whole family. Dynamis has an extensive knowledge of all the different curricula available to home educators.



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