

Faan 's Veggie News

November 2014

The Romans used to say: "*Tempus fugit*" and nothing has changed over all these years. No matter in which language you say it, *time flies*. Less than two months before Christmas, so if you want to spoil yourself with lovely fresh vegetables from your own garden during the Christmas holidays, now is the time to make sure that your veggies will be ready. On average the time from planting to maturity is between 60 to 90 days for most vegetables, but remember that you can shorten this period considerably by planting seedlings and not seed. Also keep in mind that you can harvest most veggies before they are fully mature. Marrows, carrots, radishes, potatoes, beetroot and beans to name but a few are delicious while still young. When thinning after sowing carrots, I often use the very small, pencil thin carrots in salads.

Cheaper food or better quality food?

People plant veggies for different reasons. I do not think that "cheaper food" tops the list, if you include all expenses. Labour has become very expensive and also unreliable, and municipal water adds to the cost.

Most people do it as a hobby, something to enjoy. Being able to see where your food comes from is another good reason, as is having fresh and healthy vegetables available when needed. Obviously the "brag factor" comes into play when you have bigger tomatoes or earlier beans than your neighbours.

Whatever your reason, veggie gardeners are special people. Always willing to share knowledge and surplus seedlings or crops, living close to the soil and nature. I have found that veggie gardeners are generally people that also get involved with herbs, food preservation (drying, bottling, making sauces etc.), and making cheese, beer or wine. We'll look at some of these a bit later when we start harvesting. So experiment a bit, and widen your horizon.



Food quality and prices

There are now approximately 7 billion people on earth, and this will increase to about 9 billion in 2050. Can you imagine the huge quantity of food needed to feed the additional 2 billion people every day? The packaging, transport, cooling and storage facilities? Experts predict that there will soon be a lot of hungry people around as there is no way in which food production and infrastructure needed can be increased to that extent in the given time.

"Feeding the world's population in the next 40 years will be a remarkably tough challenge. Time is running out: there is no central authority to take charge and public policies are generally myopic" Farmer's Weekly - 11 October 2013

I'm sure none of the people reading this newsletter will be suffering any food shortages, but let's look at the impact of this increased demand. Economics teaches that when demand is more than supply, prices will increase. Growers will also face such a huge demand that the market will have to accept lower quality. We therefore face a double blow - lower quality products at higher prices.

I want to encourage all vegetable gardeners to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with others. **Let's get South Africa growing food!** I have been involved with a few community projects and can assure you that people are more than willing to learn and work to establish their own veggie gardens. Please get involved, even if only planting an extra bed of spinach for your domestic worker or gardener. Taking home some fresh produce can make a huge difference to these people.

Steve is involved with eDeaf in Johannesburg, and they want to start planting some veggies. He recently donated these planted containers to get them started. Well done!



See what other people are doing

It is worth looking at the web site of *Kitchen Gardeners International*: www.kgi.org This is a global non-profit with about **35 000 members** worldwide, and it is free to join. I have had very good response to questions submitted, and it is wonderful to see what kitchen gardeners around the world are planting, eating, preserving and busy with. Have a look at **Learning to grow: Carla's Story** to see what should be done all over South Africa.

The other thing worth doing is to *Google* SPIN farming (**S**mall **P**lot **I**ntensive farming). You will be amazed to see how people are producing vegetables worth about \$50000 per annum on urban properties. Some people predict that this is the future of vegetable production - on urban properties and not on farms. I believe that this is already the case in Zimbabwe, where most of the produce in shops and markets are produced in urban gardens.

Planting density

You can grow much more food in smaller spaces by planting veggies closer together than the spacing suggested on seed packets. If you have good soil with plenty of compost added, there is no reason why you should not plant closer together, obviously within reason. Individual plants still need enough sunlight and water, but that should not be a problem. Try smaller spacing, or tall plants in the back, the front filled with lower growing veggies. Urban gardening is very different to farms or large plots - look at the photos under *SPIN farming* to see what can be achieved.

The importance of bees

We often forget the importance of bees and other pollinating insects in the vegetable garden. If there are no bees around, you will not have bumper crops. I have a big lavender plant and perennial basil close to my veggies, and these flowers act like a magnet to attract bees. I often leave some veggies to go to seed and flower to attract and encourage bees. At the same time the flowers provide a patch of colour. Have you seen the beautiful blue flowers of leeks, or the white mass of rocket in bloom? A few Jerusalem Artichokes will provide beautiful sunflower-like flowers at a higher level. A vegetable garden can be a feast of food and colour!



What to plant and do in November

Gardeners are all excited about planting during September and October, and then lose their enthusiasm during November. No reason, as now is a good time to start succession sowing - sowing that second batch that will mature a bit later than the veggies already planted.

All summer veggies can still be sown or planted as seedlings. Try beans, beetroot, carrots, celery, cucumber, peppers (both sweet peppers and chilies), pumpkin, potatoes, radish, Swiss chard, tomato, or turnips. Every garden should have at least one rhubarb plant for those delicious rhubarb pies that granny used to make.

Remember that December and January are hot months, with a very strong sun. Plant varieties that cannot tolerate too much heat in places where there will be some afternoon shade, or dappled shade under a tree throughout the day. In general, all plants with large leaves like Swiss chard, lettuce, comfrey, and rhubarb will do better with some afternoon shade. Even my tomatoes grow better against a western wall.

Tomatoes should now be stretching, so stake the plants and trim off the bottom leaves to a height of about 30cm. This increases airflow, and you will have less problems with pests at ground level. If they are not under shade cloth, do not remove all the bottom leaves as this could lead to sunburn.



Last season's tomatoes (Variety "Oxheart"). Note the shade cloth.

Beans

Runner beans should be well established and need stakes at least 1.8 meters high. Now is the time to plant some more beans, so look for an empty space somewhere. Beans keep very well in the freezer. Plant now to fill up for winter.



"Lazy Housewife" beans.

Weeds

The rain was obviously also a trigger to start weeds growing in full force. Letting weeds go to seed is like breaking a mirror - seven years of bad luck! Older generations used to say "*One year's seed is seven year's weed*" So just get down to it, and remove those weeds while still young. Weeds (without seed!) can be added to the compost heap.

Snails and cutworms

After the rain we've had, snails and slugs have become active, so be on the lookout! Protect newly planted seedlings from cutworms by placing the cardboard inside of a toilet roll around plants. I never keep enough of these, so just make my own. Easy - cut thin cardboard or thin plastic in 15cm x 6cm strips, roll the ends together, and staple. Press this ring into the soil around the seedling for about 2cm, and that should be the end of your cutworm problem. I have never seen snails climb over this obstacle either.



That's it for now! Enjoy your veggie gardening during November.

Faan.

This newsletter is intended as a guide only and is distributed to a small group of dedicated local vegetable gardeners on request. Suggestions, comments or ideas for future newsletters are always welcome. If this newsletter has been forwarded to you by someone else, please e-mail me if you would like to receive further copies directly.

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