SOUTH AFRICAN SMALLHOLDER

NOVEMBER 2021

EVERYTHING A SMALL FARMER NEEDS



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Dealing with flies in summer

Benefits of stinging nettle

...and more!

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FEATURE



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NEWS



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EDITOR'S COMMENT

A glimmer of hope



For those of us who are worried about the future of our planet in the face of global warming and climate disaster, there are some glimmers of hope that all may not be ~ yet ~ lost. That's the view of Bill McKibben, Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College, Vermont, USA, and leader of the climate campaign group 350.org.

Furthermore, in McKibben's view, those faint glimmers of hope may in fact be brightening and growing day by day.

McKibben cites two factors as being our possible saviour from climate catastrophe, each complementing the other. The first, he says is the astonishing fall in the cost of renewable energy, and the efficiency with which it works. The other, he says, is the huge growth worldwide of citizens' movements demanding action on climate growth, which is driving moves to persuade investors to steer away from putting money into dirty energy projects such as coal and oil, while at the same time putting pressure on governments to get moving with real policy changes.

McKibben may have a point. If you look at the rest of the world it is not hard to see real progress being made (elsewhere, at least) towards moving away from dirty hydrocarbon fuels towards something cleaner. Electric vehicles are now not only more efficient, but are becoming more popular, even mainstream.

And, slowly, the terminology around energy is changing: "alternative energy" is now becoming mainstream. Solar, wind, geothermal and hydro are terms that were only heard in the lingo of scientists and boffins a few years ago, but which are now part of even non-technical peoples' dinnertable conversation.

While the move to renewables is welcome for everybody on the planet, it is not necessarily good news for the South African economy. Having just about mined out our gold reserves, we are left with two huge mineral resources, neither of which is going to feature as a growth sector in the world's future, namely platinum and coal. Take away petrol and diesel engines and you don't need platinum for catalytic converters.

And as for coal, the story is well-known. We can only hope that Eskom's Kusile and Medupi are the last coal-fired power plants to be built in South Africa. And that plans to accept Chinese money to build coal-fired plants in Limpopo get swept into the dustbin.

For that to be assured, however, will mean that we need a more enlightened minerals and energy minister than former coal miner and energy-Luddite Gwede Mantashe.

Pete Bower

Editor

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INBOX

Can't find smallholder quantities anywhere!



Sir ~ Agricultural co-ops and suppliers are losing focus on serving the needs of the small farmer and smallholder sectors, it seems. I recently tried to buy a couple of kilograms of yellow maize seed for planting in a small patch, to supplement the feed I give my poultry. By which I mean I needed more than one gets in a standard seed packet from a commercial retail seed brand and considerably less than the 25kg sacks sold at my local co-op. Nowhere could I find what I wanted. Eventually I found an online supplier with a 5kg minimum pack size, which means I now have enough seed for next year's planting, too. The same goes for pharmaceuticals and other agri-chemicals. If it is pesticides one is after one can find such in little packets or bottles suitable for a suburban garden (and if it needs diluting often in concentrations that are virtually impossible to calculate) or in bulk quantities so large and toxic that one could poison an entire river system. But a quantity suitable for application on a plot of a couple of hectares? Nope. Can we not start a campaign to persuade manufacturers and retailers to cater for what is, surely, a growing market? Namely the small farmer and smallholder?

Freddie Germishuizen
Eastern Cape





NEWS

Rural trade shows make a strong comeback



With last month's Sakeliga KragDag show east of Pretoria (pictured right) having been one of very few rural shows to have been staged this year, things will return to a greater semblance of normality next year as organisers plan to restart their events. May 2022 will be a particularly busy month for avid showgoers and stand organisers with no fewer than three popular shows having already announced their dates.

They kick off with the 59th Walkerville Agricultural Show to be held south of Johannesburg on 7 and 8 May. The last Walkerville show took place a week before Pres Ramaphosa announced the first Covid lockdown, with the 2021 event being postponed. The Walkerville show is one of few old-time agricultural fairs, featuring a mix of livestock, plant and seed sales, homewares, clothing, delicatessen products, agricultural machinery and a good pub and food court. There is plenty of entertainment, as well as fun for the kids, with competitions galore.

The show has also become the preferred exhibition time for the Gauteng Rabbit Breeders Association, and features an extensive poultry exhibition as well.

Following the Walkerville show things move to Bothaville in the Free State, where the Nampo Harvest Day takes place between 17 and 20 May. This event has grown to be the biggest agricultural show by far in Southern Africa, drawing exhibitors from all over the world, and visitors from all corners of the sub-continent. The last Nampo Harvest Day to be held at the extensive, dedicated Nampo Park showgrounds took place in 2019.





Mounted display at KragDag.

Last year's event was replaced by a much-scaled-down virtual event, and this years' event was cancelled outright.

Exhibitors who are entrenched in the agri-show circuit then have a week to pack up their stands and get set up again in Pietermaritzburg's Royal Showgrounds for the 169th Royal Agricultural Show, which is scheduled for 27 May to 5 June.

Later in the year, the KragDag show is scheduled for August 2022, with an alternative date pencilled in for October if necessary (as was the case this year). No fewer than 488 exhibitors were said to have taken part in this year's KragDag, and the organisers claim visitor numbers of 21 000 through the gates, the same as attended the last show in 2019.

KragDag, now moving on from its 14th year, has thus established itself as the largest self-sufficiency show in the country.





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Thai vets ID single AHS strain in outbreak



With the arrival of the southern summer comes the annual increase of the often-fatal affliction of African Horse Sickness (AHS) among the equine population. Apart from horse owners in the Western Cape, whose animals are largely kept free of the disease by strict movement and quarantine regulations between the Western Cape and the rest of the country, horse owners and stable yards throughout the rest of South Africa must embark on an annual inoculation programme at this time of year, coupled with midge-control measures in their stables. Despite all these measures, outbreaks of AHS are sometimes detected in counties far from African shores. One such outbreak which occurred in March 2020 in Thailand, was investigated by that country's veterinary authority and their conclusions recently reported.

When certain animals started showing symptoms of AHS the stable manager contacted the scientists and blood samples were drawn from one animal, with post mortems carried out on a further two carcasses. Since then a further spate of outbreaks were reported affecting no fewer than 2 700 horses spread across 17 provinces of Thailand.

Virologists have identified nine identified strains of the disease, numbered for convenience from 1 to 9. Commonly, infections of strains 1 to 8 are reported from the restricted areas of southern Africa. Strain 9 is more widespread, and causes periodic epidemics outside Africa, while strain 4 caused outbreaks in Spain and Portugal between 1987 and 1990.

But, among all the animals tested in Thailand last year, only one strain, namely No1, was detected.

The veterinarians concluded that the strain must have been imported into Thailand via a subclinically infected animal, probably a zebra.

The Thai authorities responded to the outbreak by importing Onderstepoort Biological Products' standard two-part AHS vaccine for administering to the affected horses and other equines in the affected areas, with good results.

The two-part vaccine contains countermeasures for all nine strains, divided between the two, four in one and five in the other.

That is why it is necessary to inject the horse with both parts, as the second injection is not a booster of the first.

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NEWS

WC agri-exports boomed in 2020



The Western Cape exported R78,68 billion worth of combined agricultural and agri-processing products in 2020, says Western Cape Dept of Agriculture agricultural economist, Tshepo Morokong.

This is a 24% increase on 2019 (R63,23 billion) and amounts to no less than 44% of national agricultural exports.

Morokong says, “In 2020, the province's primary agricultural exports accounted for 53% of national primary agricultural exports, beverages 70%, processed meat, fish and fruit products 44%, leather and related products 31% and dairy 22%.”

Morokong also highlights that the province contributes over 20% to the national agricultural employment numbers.

Western Cape agriculture minister Dr Ivan Meyer says that increased investment in agri-processing can lead to more jobs in the Western Cape.

“Primary agriculture accounts for 10% of the province's employment and agri-processing 4%, which combined account for 14% of the employment in 2020.”

The growth in Western Cape agri-exports last year is particularly remarkable given the strict regulations that were put in place during the initial Covid lockdown which effectively closed the door on the movement of alcoholic beverages which, in the form of wine, constitute of the region’s biggest export commodities.

Another factor which affected the shipping industry last year were delays caused by labour shortages in Cape Town’s harbour, as a result of Covid quarantining and infections.



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FarmFundi app will ID pests, weeds, etc



To enable farmers and smallholders to identify pests, diseases and weeds in their crops, Corteva Agriscience's FarmFundi app provides a digital pest and disease identification guide for farmers across Africa and the Middle East.

Once threats are accurately identified using the app, farmers can then respond with the correct remedy.

Says Linda van der Merwe, marketing lead, Corteva Agriscience, "researchers estimate that invasive species alone cost Africa's agricultural sector $74,3 billion each year, compounded by an approximate $21,5 billion worth of crop losses inflicted by insects and other pests.

"We are (thus) excited to bring our digital tool to farmers in Africa and the Middle East, the first such in the market.

"Our collaboration with Plantix allows us to combine innovative mobile farming technology with the insights and expertise of our technical teams, so helping to mitigate potential impacts to livelihoods and food security."

The user-friendly platform lets farmers upload or scan pictures, along with a short description of symptoms and accompanying notes, enabling timeous remedial or preventative action to be taken.

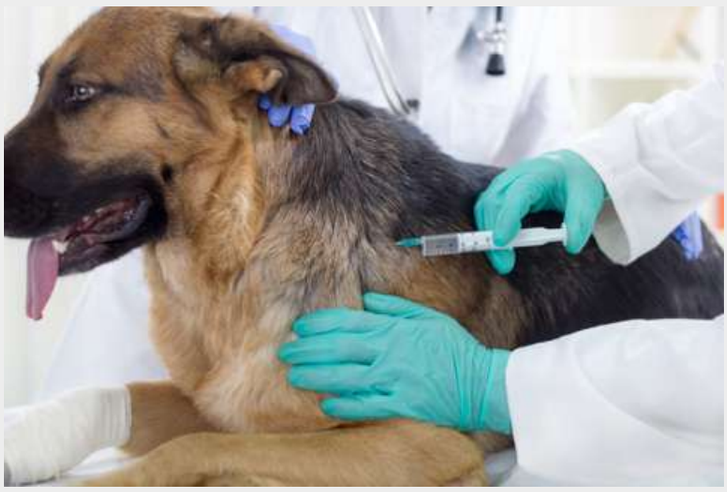
Experts are also able to update and transfer the latest information on new, emerging pests and trends in real time.

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Rabies hits W Cape dogs after 27 years



After a rabies-free period of nearly three decades the fatal disease has made an appearance among dogs in the Western Cape, specifically in Strand and Gordon's Bay, prompting animal welfare authorities and the Western Cape Dept of Agriculture to urge residents to get their dogs vaccinated. So far, four dogs have been diagnosed as having the disease, prompting concern among veterinarians and animal welfare workers, and resulting in targeted vaccination drives in affected areas. The department says it plans to vaccinate 70 000 animals in the 2021/22 financial year, pointing out that it is a legal requirement that dogs and cats be vaccinated twice within their first year and at least every three years thereafter.

Rabies in animals is fatal, and there is no cure. Humans that are bitten by rabid animals also stand to die of the disease if they don't take immediate steps to mitigate against infection.



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DNA tests on Gauteng cattle show useful trends



With many farmers affected by stock-theft and with valuable genetic material lost as a result, Gauteng has shown an overall upward trend in the number of stock theft cases over the past ten years.

And western Gauteng has a particularly high number of cattle owned by emerging farmers. Genetic analysis of livestock in the western Gauteng farming system was undertaken from July 2020 highlighting the integration of DNA technology and its potential to smallholder farmers in western Gauteng. According to the Agricultural Research Council's project leader Dr Pranisha Soma the findings are now in and show the population structure as well as the differences among the animals in the three municipalities in which the research was done (City of Johannesburg, Merafong and Randfontein). Says Soma: "A total of 266 cattle hair samples were collected. The samples were subjected to various laboratory procedures and statistical analysis was done.



Cattle hair samples.

"Cattle breeds, namely Afrikander, Nguni, Brahman, Bonsmara, Drakensberger and Angus, were included as reference breeds.

"The results showed that there were low levels of inbreeding among the cattle populations. This indicates that there is an opportunity for proper selection and improved breeding programmes."

Findings also indicated that these cattle populations represent an important source for genetic variation which may be valuable for future conservation studies. Overall, the study populations illustrated a close genetic relationship with each other. In addition, the study populations displayed close relationships with the reference breeds: Johannesburg with Brahman and Nguni, Merafong to Nguni, Bonsmara and Afrikander, and Randfontein to Nguni, Brahman, Drakensberger and Afrikander. These demonstrate that the study populations are mixed.

Soma adds, "Moreover, the farmers

indicated that bulls are shared and sold during mating season, which may possibly explain the close relationship, considering the relatively short geographical distance separating each municipality (all three municipalities are within a 70 km radius). The genetic information provided in this study may be used to develop and improve breeding strategies of small-scale farmers in western Gauteng."

According to Soma this study may serve as a pilot study to conduct similar research in other provinces. Improved cattle management has potential to create more jobs in the sector and simultaneously contribute to an increase in household income and improved livelihoods. Through this project, farmers were also able to acquire skills and knowledge in the application of DNA which may assist in reducing the incidence of stock theft in this area. The project has now been extended to the Tshwane and Lesedi municipalities. "The participation and interest in the project can be commended, and researchers would like to extend participation to even more farmers in the Gauteng region," says Soma.

For further information: Dr Pranisha Soma, Agricultural Research Council, Animal Production campus, call 012 672 9218, or email at Pranisha@arc.agric.za. ❀



SMART SMALLHOLDERS

KZN co-op fights food insecurity



Entrepreneurship in agriculture is very important. That's the view of Lindokuhle Mthembu, chairman of the Zozubhodle Co-operative in the kwaHlaza area of Empangeni, KwaZulu-Natal. “There are no jobs, so we must make our own jobs. We have to help ourselves and our community. We want to improve the standard of living of the people.”

The Zozubhodle Co-operative has been growing vegetables in kwaHlaza since 2018.

There are six members of the co-operative, three women and three men, ranging in age from 21 to their mid-forties. They formally registered the co-operative and would otherwise all be unemployed.



Members of Zozubhodle work their land.

When they started, Mthembu was a student at Durban University of Technology and he used part of his Nsfas student loan to pay for the hire of a tractor.

After starting by renting some land, they were allocated 20 hectares by the king. They do not yet use all of their land, as water is a huge challenge. At the moment they only use 8ha. Although they are near a river, they do not have any irrigation equipment and have been severely affected by lack of rain.





In the drought of 2019 the co-op lost most of its crops. Even in 2021, rainfall has been lower than normal.

However, the group perseveres. "Zozubhodle means the more you work hard, the more profit you will make," comments Mthembu.

The co-op grows spinach, potatoes, butternut, beans and onions. The members sell the produce locally, which gives them money to buy more seed. On part of the land they practice no-till growing and use organic fertiliser such as chicken or cow manure. On other parts they use a hired tractor to plough, and chemical fertiliser. Mthembu says that the land is rich. This year they have planted 2ha with castor beans, which they will take to market.



Members of the co-op.

"Without agriculture there would be no economy," says Mthembu. "We aim to create employment and to educate the youth about agriculture."

Contact Zozubhodle Co-Op on 061 659 6038.





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PEST CONTROL

Ideas for summer fly control



When you ask the internet how to deal with flies, often the solutions are household remedies such as cleaning up after pets and removing decaying food. For smallholders with livestock, pets and compost heaps these methods aren't always enough and we often resort to using fly traps.

There are a number of types of fly traps, some more effective than others. And some more pleasant on the eye and nose than others.

Flies are part of the insect order *Diptera*, all of which have a single set of wings. Flies lay their eggs on animal faeces, rubbish, and in rotting organic material. They are a nuisance, and they can also spread disease, so managing them throughout summer is important.

In the garden

Some herbs are said to repel flies. Planting basil, lavender, marigolds, catnip and bay leaf trees has shown some results. One can also pick these herbs and hang them in doorways and windows to repel flies from your house.

Electronic traps

At the top end of the technological scale are electric and electronic mosquito and fly killers. These usually combine some form of light source, often ultra-violet, on the basis that insects are attracted to light, with a minituarised lethal “electric fence” that fries the hapless insect on contact. At the upper, almost industrial end is a wall-mounted unit that retails for about R600. They are odour-free, but do result in a loud “crack” sound each time an insect makes contact. They are also indiscriminate, and will kill bees and other beneficial flying insects as well.

One of the problems associated with these as fly killers is that the fly's field of vision is not very great, so it needs to be no more than a couple of metres from the trap to begin with to be attracted by the light.

Smaller models are available too, many that plug into a USB port, and so can be useful in office environments. These usually work as traps, with the electronic source simply attracting the insect, which then has no means of escape.

Red Top fly catchers

Smallholders have long used the locally-developed Red Top fly

catchers. These can often be spotted hanging in a stable yard or around animal kraals. These disposable traps are readily available and inexpensive.



They work off a powdered bait that is mixed with water and poured into the bottom of the plastic catching bag. The bait is activated by the water, and also by sunlight. Flies are lured by the smell, fly through the red top and into the bag below where they are trapped and die. Some studies show that female flies are more attracted to these baited traps, which assists in reducing the reproductive population of flies in your environment.

Once dead, the flies themselves become bait. Their decomposing corpses let off a further odour that attracts more flies.

Once the trap is full, the bag detaches from the red lid. You can empty the contents of the bag on to your compost heap as the bait and the decomposing flies are all organic. But, it is very important you dig this into your compost heap or else you will simply attract more flies. You also run the risk of emptying eggs out along with the corpses, thus perpetuating the lifecycle of the pest.

While effective, these traps can be smelly and can only really be deployed some distance away from your house and working area. For this reason, they are popular in stable yards and livestock sheds.

iCatchi

Also locally-developed and produced, the iCatchi uses a process of separation to trap and kill flies. Enticed by an organic bait supplied with the trap, the flies are lured into the trap through rectangular



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holes between the bait and the drying chamber. With the bait chamber protected by a separation mesh, the flies are unable to access the bait, but instead are drawn upwards towards the light, trapping themselves in the drying chamber. There, without access to food or water, they dehydrate and die. Because the flies never touch the bait, they can be repurposed as food for chickens, fish or reptiles. The bait itself is organic and safe to use around animals. The iCatchi produces little odour detectable by humans making it easier to use close to domestic activity.

The iCatchi comes with four sachets of bait and a mixing bottle. One sachet mixed with one litre of warm water in the bottle is enough for four replenishments, which are done at weekly or less frequent intervals. The bait remaining in the bottle will continue to decompose so when topping up the trap on the bottle's second or third use, the bait is much stronger and will be immediately effective. Traps left in full sun are most effective. They can be hung from trees or beams, or it also comes with a stake so it can be mounted in the ground. These traps are available at co-ops and hardware shops and additional bait can also be bought separately.

Flypaper

An adhesive strip hung from the roof of your chicken coop or workshop



can also prove effective in catching flies. The strip is coated with a sweet, sticky substance that attracts and traps the flies. Some brands use a poison in their bait, others simply work by trapping the flies.



Flypaper is effective but can be very unsightly. When used in chicken coops, you run the risk of your chickens getting stuck to the paper and losing feathers so you must ensure the paper is positioned where your birds or animals can't reach it. Some formulas used for the sticky bait can carry an odour. These traps also tend to fill up quickly, requiring more regular changing than other larger traps. But they can also fit in smaller spaces so might suit certain situations better.

The bait can be annoying when trying to remove and replace the trap, making your hands sticky. Some people use vegetable oil to effectively remove the bait if you have got it on your hands.

Flypaper can lose its effectiveness over time as the bait dries, becomes less alluring and not sticky enough to trap the fly. Dust can also affect the stickiness so using flypaper in a woodworking workshop or stable yard that uses dusty bedding might not be successful.

Homemade flypaper

You will need a brown paper bag, pan, baking tray and drying racks, ¼ cup of sugar, ¼ syrup or honey and ¼ cup water. Most takeaway outlets now serve their food in brown paper bags, so you can save these for summer. Cut your brown paper bag into strips. In your pan, combine sugar, syrup and water, heating and stirring until the sugar dissolves. Remove the pan from the heat, submerge the strips in the sugar-water mixture, and allow them to sit long enough to become saturated.

Remove the strips with tongs, place them on drying racks and allow the strips to drip dry fully. Hang these strips as you would any flypaper. Like bought flypaper, your homemade version will dry out over time. But unlike bought paper, when it loses its stickiness you can just wet your homemade paper again, or replace it with a fresh batch.





A wasp to help with your fly problem



While there are a number of products on the market to help keep fly numbers down, few are environmentally friendly, with some chemical-based solutions also not suited to use around all animals.

Eastern Cape-based Bio-Insectaries SA (Bisa) breeds a parasite wasp, *Muscidifurax raptor*, that feeds exclusively on fly pupae (the stage between chrysalis and adult) to control fly numbers.

The wasp is a natural enemy of the house fly and stable fly. The female wasp stings the pupa, feeds on the developing fly and can also lay her eggs in the pupa. The developing fly in the pupa is thus killed and its place taken by a new generation of wasps that emerges through the process of parasitism. Because of the stage at which the wasp takes over, the flies are controlled before they reach maturity and therefore are unable to cause irritation and damage.

Flies do not develop immunity to the wasps as they might to pesticides and the wasps can reach hard to reach breeding places, making this a consistent, long-term solution to the fly problem. Chemicals can also be harmful to other insects in a biome ~ beetles, bees, spiders etc ~ where these wasps do not affect the natural fauna. Bisa, which has been around since 2005, rears the parasitoid in an insectary for releasing, and sells packs of 5 000. These parasitoids are released into hot-spots on a regular basis. The company encourages that the parasitoids are released in safe places with protection against birds, cattle thoroughfare and chemical sprays. The programme is seasonal, with parasitoids released at regular intervals to ensure success. Bisa recommends that for smallholders, neighbours work together to identify fly hotspots in their area to better target the wasps.

The company has seen success with a number of locations including feedlots, dairies and horse studs.

Bisa also encourages users to reduce fly breeding by paying special attention to manure management, reducing feed spillage, reducing spilling from silage pits and prevention of water leaks.

For more information contact Bisa at www.bioinsectsa.com or call 083 270 4866 or 083 566 4784.

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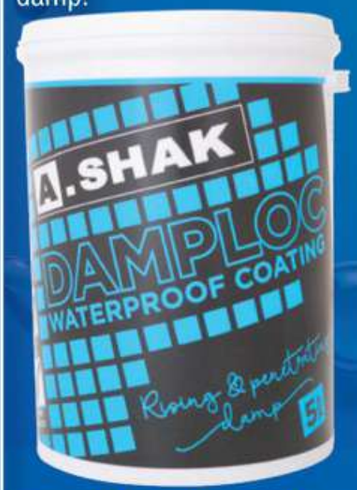


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IN THE GARDEN

BioBin introduces odourless composting



Composting on steroids: that's the best layman's description one can give to the Biobin organic waste management system.

Using nothing more than enhanced versions of the factors that make any successful composting process work, namely air flow and heat, the Biobin system provides a no-smell, no-mess solution to the disposal of organic waste in applications where other waste disposal methods would generate smell, flies and environmental degradation.

Such settings include large institutions, hotels and lodges, school hostels, clubs, stable yards, food processing plants, factories and shopping centres.

In rural applications the Biobin system would provide an excellent solution to waste disposal on poultry farms, which frequently come under attack from neighbours for the smell generated, and flies thus attracted, by the unhygienic disposal of carcasses, litter etc.

The Biobin system requires no added chemicals or enhancers, relying simply on the process itself to do the necessary.

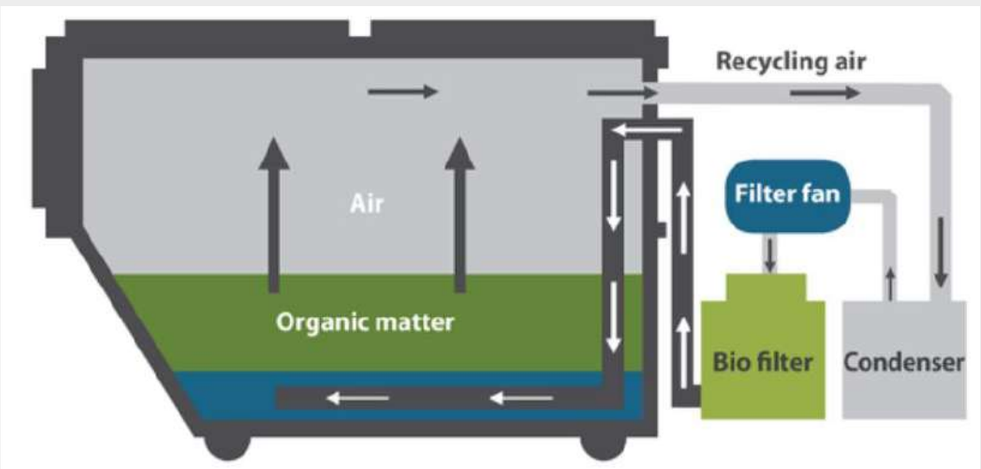
The system comprises an airtight chamber (there are three sizes) coupled to an electrically-powered air purification and circulation system.

Organic waste is dropped into the chamber through airtight hatches as it is generated.

Air is then pumped into the chamber underneath the organic waste, through which it percolates to the top of the chamber.

The introduction of air allows for the growth of micro-organisms that make the composting process happen, as well as helping in the generation of heat in the waste which takes care of any pathogens in the waste.

Along the way, of course, the air picks up odours from the waste. The odiferous air is then extracted from the top



How BioBin works.

of the chamber and recirculated through a purification system that is designed to remove unpleasant smells.

Because the system is sealed, odours are thus contained, and there is nothing to announce the presence of decaying organic matter to passing flies and rodents.

There are three sizes of Biobin suitable for different applications, ranging from a container of 2m^3 capacity able to handle about 1,5 tons of waste (depending on the nature of the waste itself) to 10m^3 capacity capable of composting about 7,5 tons. And when the chamber has reached capacity and one is satisfied that the composting of the older material is complete, one simply opens a lower hatch and shovels out odour-free, rich compost for application to one's garden, or resale.



The composting contents of a BioBin.

For more information visit www.biobin.co.za or call 082 578 1934.



Save electricity with a charcoal cooler



Small farmers and smallholders with limited resources can lower the temperature and maintain the quality of their fresh produce before it leaves for market by housing it in a DIY-built charcoal cooling chamber.

The cooler uses the principle of evaporative cooling to maintain a cool interior temperature for refrigeration and food preservation. The principle is that the temperature of dry air can be lowered significantly when liquid water vapourises through evaporation.

This process can cool air using much less energy than through mechanical refrigeration.

The construction of the chamber starts with building an open timber frame. The walls of the chamber are created by two layers of chicken wire with a space between them. The space is filled with charcoal. To lower the interior temperature the charcoal must be kept moist.

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Charcoal is an ideal material for refrigeration because it has pores, which absorb and store water. As the stored water evaporates in contact with air this reduces heat from outside. A wall of wet charcoal does not allow easy passage of heat, so it results in low temperatures inside the chamber. Refrigeration of food entails slowing bacterial growth and extends the shelf life of the fresh produce. While the charcoal cooling chamber is not typically capable of maintaining temperatures of 2-3^{0}C as found in mechanical refrigeration systems, it can be significantly cooler inside than ambient temperature, and even moderate drops can significantly extend the shelf life of produce. Because the charcoal is kept wet, the air moisture content is increased, which prevents food from drying out. The chamber will be more effective in drier areas, where humidity is less than 30%. Obviously there must be a constant supply of water to the charcoal. Depending on the size of the chamber, it may use 20-70 litres of water per day when working effectively.



Inside a charcoal cooler. Image: Taha.or.tz







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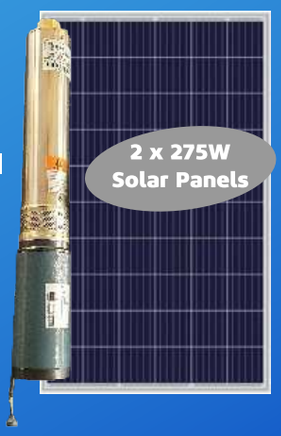


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Is stinging nettle really a pain?



Recently there has been a rash of interest (pun fully intended), particularly on social media, around the growing, harvesting and use of stinging nettle. This is why.

The nettle that is so useful comes in two forms: *Urtica dioica* is perennial and *Urtica urens* is an annual.

Sometimes called common nettle, it has long been used a food source, for tea, raw material for textiles and for medicinal purposes. Stinging nettle is native to Europe, North Africa, North America and Asia, but has been introduced worldwide. There are also many other species in the *Urticaceae* family.

Stinging nettle is called Brand Netel in Afrikaans, Irhawu in isiXhosa, Imbati in isiZulu.

It is a herbaceous plant and often grows to about 2m in height. The plant can spread vegetatively, often forming dense colonies.

The bright green, oval, serrated leaves are borne oppositely along the stem, and both the stems and leaves are covered with numerous stinging and non-stinging plant hairs. The dna etihw dna llams era srewofl grouped in clusters.

Urtica Iobulata is indigenous to South Africa and is found in Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

The leaves of *U Iobulata* are much broader than those of the other two species and the stinging hairs seem to be more distinctive.

Nettle leaves and roots are most nutritious.

They contain Vitamins A,

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several Bs, C and K. Minerals include calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and sodium. They have different fats, all the essential amino acids, plus polyphenols and pigments.

The leaves are eaten cooked in soups, stir fry and stews, mixed in with vegetables such as spinach or onion and garlic. Raw leaves and stems are used in smoothies, pesto and salads. Tea is made from fresh or dried leaves, stems or roots.

Because it stings, animals do not eat nettle in the field, but once they are cut and dried they make nutritious and easily digested fodder.

Interestingly, the time of harvesting influences the chemical composition of wild stinging nettle, as different properties are more noticeable at different times of the year.

Medicinally, people use nettle to do the following:

- ❑ To clear toxins;
- ❑ As a tonic after illness and anaemia;
- ❑ To control bleeding;
- ❑ As an antioxidant;
- ❑ To assist in lowering blood sugar levels and blood pressure;
- ❑ To reduce enlarged prostate;
- ❑ As an anti-histamine for hay fever, asthma and skin complaints like eczema and itchy skin;
- ❑ In anti-inflammatory treatment of

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arthritis, rheumatism and gout;

❑ To apply to burns and insect bites.

Ironically, the very hairs which cause such a painful sting contain chemicals which work as a pain-killer. The down-side to nettles is that they easily become invasive. Should smallholders want to plant them for all their virtues, they need to be severely restricted. They can invade and takes up space in grassland. You do not want nettles in your pastures as they are unpalatable and painful to livestock if trodden.

❑ Stinging nettle is not to be confused with Blister Bush (*Notububon galbanum*), which is also called hog's



fennel and is part of the *Apiaceae* family that is native to South Africa. It is part of the same family as the edible carrot and herbs, fennel and dill. Blister bush is particularly found in the mountains of the Western Cape. The poison in Blister Bush is Coumarin, which is used in chemical form in rat poisons as a blood thinner.

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What's the buzz about carpenter bees?



To most smallholders, a bee is a bee, they're all more or less the same. However, it turns out that South Africa has a rich diversity of bees, with close to 1 000 species. One of the species is the Carpenter Bee *(Xylocopa caffra)*. This species is found throughout the country and, indeed, throughout much of Africa.

The female is black, with two bands, which can be white or yellow. They are sometimes mistaken for a Bumblebee, but South Africa does not have true bumblebees.

The male Carpenter Bee is greenish-yellow.

They are stout and bigger than most honey bees.

They are called Carpenter Bees because they burrow into timber, as well as plant stems and branches of trees. Many favour aloes and agave plants.

They do not eat the wood.

Carpenter bees are solitary, so they do not live with other bees in a swarm, and will breed on their own. They drill a tunnel into a plant or timber to use as their home. After mating the female will divide the tunnel into cells, using the sawdust that she has chewed to form partitions.

Each egg is sealed into its chamber with pollen and nectar. The larvae hatch, and feed upon the food that has been supplied. The larvae develop and pupate in their chamber and will eventually emerge as adult bees.

Carpenter bees are important pollinators and are particularly remarkable as buzz pollinators. Certain plants, including some vegetables, require what is called buzz pollination, which is needed to release the microscopic pollen balls



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from the tiny pores at the tips of the anthers of the flower. When the carpenter bee lands on the flower it clasps the anther. The sound it makes changes slightly as the rate at which it beats its wings changes.

The bee is then able to disengage its flight muscles from the wings and uses these muscles to shake the anthers violently. The anthers respond to the sound frequency caused by the vibrations by opening up pores at their tips to shower the bee in pollen. It eats the high-protein pollen and wipes it down its body to fill small sacks on its lower legs. It is then able to carry the pollen back to its nest. Another remarkable habit of the female carpenter bee is that she has an abdominal chamber in which she carries phoretic mites. These mites feed on nest fungi, ensuring that the pollen and nectar that has been left for the larvae will not be affected by fungus. Carpenter bees adapt well to a variety of habitats or biomes throughout South Africa.

The male carpenter bee is territorial and will behave aggressively in protection of his nest. Male Carpenter Bees cannot sting. The female has a sting, which is very painful, but is rarely used as she is not aggressive. If you are concerned about carpenter bees burrowing into wood in your house or out buildings you can take precautions which will not damage these essential pollinators. These bees prefer bare wood, so where your wood is exposed, stain it, paint it or use a chemical treatment that will discourage the bees. Apparently they do not like citrus or almond oil, so you can spray or paint your timber with one of them. Carpenter bees are also sensitive to vibrations and loud noise. If you see a tunnel, play loud music with a booming base near the nest. This is likely to make them leave, without harming them.



Male carpenter bee. Image: Jon Richfield

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How to manage ewe uterine prolapse



Most ewes have no problems during lambing. However, in a small flock it is not unlikely that a smallholder might have to deal with a prolapsed vagina at some stage. A prolapse takes place when a ewe pushes her vagina out of her vulva. You will notice a smooth, red mass hanging out, varying in size from a tennis ball to a melon. There are various reasons why this might happen.

❑ Excessive body condition – the sheep is too fat;
❑ She might be carrying multiple lambs;
❑ High fibre diets, particularly those containing root crops;
❑ Lack of exercise where the sheep is in a small field;
❑ Lameness leading to prolonged periods of lying down;
❑ Short-docked tails;
❑ Steep fields;
❑ Low blood calcium.

The behaviour of the sheep might



draw your attention to her condition. She might isolate herself from the flocks or she might appear off her feed. She might spend long periods lying on her side with repeated, short-duration, forceful abdominal straining, along with vocalisation. She might start nesting by pawing at bedding. The prolapse should be pushed back in as soon as it is seen, to prevent infection and further discomfort. If it is left longer blood flow to the tissue can be reduced. This causes tissue death. The prolapse turns purple or black in colour and becomes dry, fragile and easy to damage. Using plenty of clean, warm water containing a suitable antiseptic or disinfectant, wash the prolapse. Remove contamination such as muck and straw. Check for any tears or signs the ewe is trying to lamb. If either is the case, take her to a veterinarian. Cover the prolapse with lubricating gel, then using a flat hand or your fist, push it back inside. Make sure that the bladder has not been trapped by the prolapse. To prevent the prolapse from happening again there are prolapse harnesses available. Probably more effective is to ask your veterinarian to apply modified Buhner suture, which closes the opening enough to allow a space of 1,5 cm diameter or two fingers' width. This can be undone once the sheep goes into labour. The vet will probably prescribe an antibiotic and painkillers once the prolapse has been dealt with. Mark the sheep so that you know not to use her for breeding again, as prolapse often reoccurs.



Smooth, red mass about the size of a tennis ball.



Prolapse harness.



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ALIEN INVASIVES

Invasive trees are also the thirstiest



It is well-known that alien invasive plant species have a negative effect on the environment where they establish themselves. What is less well-known, however, is the magnitude of the effect that invasive plants have on the available water resources ~ a matter of great importance to a water-scarce country such as South Africa.

Environmental scientists have said that in 2020 that the impacts of invasive alien plants on surface water runoff are estimated at 1,44 to 2,44 billion m^3 per year. That's somewhere between the capacity of the Bloemhof Dam at 1,2 billion m^3 when full and the Vaal Dam at 2,6 billion m^3.

The trees that drink the most are black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), silver wattle (*A dealbata*), and early green wattle (*A decurrens*), followed by species of pines and Eucalyptus. Mesquite (*Prosopis*), pictured top right, is also problematic, along with hakea in certain areas. As an example, the water-use of the black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) has been found to be about twice that of the native forest species in the Eastern Cape. A single pine tree consumes at least 20% more water than the fynbos shrub-land that it threatens in the Western Cape.

The government's Working for Water programme came into being in response to the massive threat to South Africa's water systems from alien invasives.

There is legislation relating to invasive alien plants, specified in laws about environmental management, agriculture, water, heritage, health and safety, and the application of herbicides. So how do you go about clearing your smallholding of invasive trees? Here are the options:

- ❑ Mechanical or physical (manual) removal of the trees;
- ❑ Burning (controlled);
- ❑ Chemical control;

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❑ Biological control involving trees' own natural enemies to combat them.

Most smallholders will not have bull-dozers or TLBs and hiring is expensive, so mechanical control is often beyond the scope of small-holders. Burning and chemical control both come with their own risks to the rest of the vegetation and wildlife. Biological control is best left to licensed experts. Which leaves physical removal of the trees as the method of choice for just a few trees on a smallholding. There are companies that specialise in the removal of trees. If you wish to do it yourself, here is a useful video on how to safely cut down a tree. But cutting down the trees is just one phase.



What can you do with the wood? Can the timber be used in DIY projects? Might you be able to sell it? Perhaps you can chop it up for fire wood or chip it to use as mulch. You might also leave the logs in situ, to prevent soil erosion and to provide homes to insects and small creatures. Whatever you decide, be sure though that there are no seeds left which will lead to new trees growing. ❀

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Two vegetables, same name



Among the out-of-the-ordinary vegetables one can grow easily in South Africa, are two with, on the face of it, similar names, but which in reality are members of different species, and are entirely different themselves. They are the two artichokes, globe and Jerusalem.

Briefly, globe artichoke plants are large pale green bushy plants with soft tap roots and upright fleshy stems, producing large multi-petalled buds which, if left to maturity, result in a pretty purple flower.

But it is the buds that one consumes.

Jerusalem artichokes, by contrast, are rangy tall plants which emerge from a tuber underground. The plants themselves are tender and need support to prevent damage from heavy wind and rain.

They are a member of the sunflower family and one eats the cooked tuber.

Globe artichoke plants take up a lot of space and yield quite sparsely so are unsuited to small gardens. The plants themselves usually survive for no more than three or four years ~ assuming their fleshy roots aren't devoured by mole-rats first.

Their most productive seasons are the summers after their first year.

The buds are cut off just below the heads, before they show any signs of opening.

The most common way of preparing them is simply by boiling in salted water till the cores are soft, and serving them, one per head, as a starter accompanied by melted salted butter to which ground black pepper is added. The edible parts are the soft flesh at the base of each petal amounting to no more than a nibble per petal. This is a nice way to start a

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convivial meal. With all the petals removed (the last few inner ones will come away in a bunch and can be nibbled together), one is confronted by the heart of the flower and the "choke", a core of fine, hairy fibres that are deeply unpleasant to eat, and which are easily cut away and discarded along with the petals.

The heart, dipped in the butter mix, is the *piece d'resistance* and can be fully savoured with a couple of sips of good, chilled dry white wine, which brings out the very best in the unique flavour of the flesh.

Another way to prepare them is to cut away the petals before cooking, paring down to the heart and leaving a few of the younger, softer petals in place. This is then lightly cooked in salted vinegared water, drained and allowed to cool, before being quartered and bottled in olive oil with garlic cloves (you can substitute sunflower oil if the cost of olive oil daunts you). Thus preserved the quarters can be added cold to salads or pizza or added to soups and stews to bring out a unique flavour.



Globe artichoke.



Jerusalem artichokes.

For Jerusalem artichokes, the edible part is the tuber, best washed and boiled whole and unpeeled. They, too, have a unique flavour, not unlike that of a parsnip, and thus not to everybody's taste.

As a result in some countries Jerusalem artichokes are considered no more than pig food.





CLIMATE CHANGE

How to combat food waste



How can we minimise food waste along the value chain? Grow your own: smallholders who grow their own vegetables and fruit can limit the number of items planted. Eat food that is in season: food that is imported or which has been kept in cold storage has a larger carbon footprint. Chop your own vegetables: pre-processed produce does not last nearly as long as veg that you peel and cut up yourself ~ plus the peels can go into your compost heap.

Eat local: check the label, as the country of origin must be stated. Do not be misled by “packaged in South Africa”, as that's not the same as “produced in South Africa”. Best-before dates are about food quality and taste, not safety. Use-by dates are about food safety, especially once you've opened the package.

Highly perishable foods such as meat products and dairy pose a food safety risk if consumed after their use-by date. Dispose of these foodstuffs to avoid the possible threat of food poisoning.



DIYers must go battery-powered



Stihl's MSA 220 C-B cordless chainsaw.

Battery is best. That's becoming clear in the DIY and garden maintenance sectors where long mains extension leads are becoming as obsolete in the DIY sector as two-stroke motors are becoming obsolete in the garden maintenance sphere.

For rechargeable batteries, running at 18V, 24V or more, are becoming suitably powerful to drive almost silent, emission-free and cordless tools for home maintenance and workshop use, as well as for previously petrol-powered garden mechanisation applications.



Cordless drill available at Adendorff Machinery Mart.

And, importantly, the cost of the batteries and chargers is reducing rapidly, meaning that rechargeable power is no longer the exclusive preserve of the well-heeled.

The advantage of rechargeable tools has been well-known to tradesmen for years as they no longer need to run long, cumbersome leads into roof spaces or around corners to reach out of the way places.

And the advantage of battery powered garden maintenance equipment over petrol is that the machines are quieter (one can work in one's garden on Sunday mornings without annoying one's neighbours), and emission free. And, with less vibration and less hassle of ensuring one has fuel, and two-stroke oil, in the correct mixture.

Having been the exclusive preserve of a few innovative brands a few years ago, battery-powered machines now form increasingly important parts of the ranges of just about all power tool and garden equipment manufacturers.

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Terrorism & a surprise



Terrorism and bombs, and the possible threat thereof, can have unintended consequences, nowhere more keenly felt than in places that have suffered from such devastating trauma in the past.

With South Africa off Britain's Covid-isolation Red List, a young man from Johannesburg decided to pay his girlfriend in London a surprise visit.

All the planning was kept *tjoep-stil*. An air ticket was booked and family and colleagues were roped in to elaborate plans to cover up the fact that he would be incommunicado for 16 hours while flying to London via Doha.

On departure night he obtained the necessary Covid clearance at the airport (at an eyewateringly exhorbitant price), enjoyed a whisky in the departure lounge and started his journey.

Disembarking at Heathrow he joined the scrum to pass through Customs and Immigration. Britain's immigration people are somewhat menacingly called the Border Force.

When his turn came he answered the usual Border Force question "what is the purpose of your visit?" with "I'm here to surprise my girlfriend" which resulted in a long discussion over the trials and tribulations of long-distance relationships, his eyewateringly expensive Covid test certificate and his multi-page UK entry contact tracing form totally ignored.

Now I should mention that as his was a fleeting weekend trip he was travelling light, all his clothing and possessions stowed tightly in a backpack.

Alight the tube at Green Park station ("mind the gap"). Up the escalator. Turn left into a hazy London afternoon. Turn left at the first corner and walk three blocks to the beloved's office. Enter, mind racing... ("Will she be upset? Will she be pleased to see me?")

The plan: Enter the building. Politely ask the receptionist to tell the beloved to come to reception as there is somebody who wishes to see her. Simple, and uber-romantic.

The reality: Enter the building. Burly security guard bars the way. "Get out!" "But I only…" "GET OUT!!"

To be fair to the security guard, this is London in 2021. Terrorism (aka suicide bombers, knifemen and other fanatics) lurk in the dark corners of fair England's capital and everybody lives in a heightened state of apprehension, not least the city's security guards. And here comes a young man with a funny (Saffer) accent, wearing a hoody and jeans and with a backpack (bomb?) on his back.

So from the pavement, by cellphone, a meeting was arranged, and the surprise reunion went ahead and a good time was had by both.

But the best laid plans of mice and men, nearly ganged badly a'gley.