



When former Jo'burg management consultant, Joy Phala became a full-time mom, she got her cooking inspiration from shows like *MasterChef*. Finding that many ingredients were too expensive or unavailable, she decided to grow her own, and because she lives in an apartment, containers were the only option.

“Water management is the most demanding aspect. Thirsty plants attract pests and diseases, are less lush, and can't cope with extreme temperatures,” she explains.

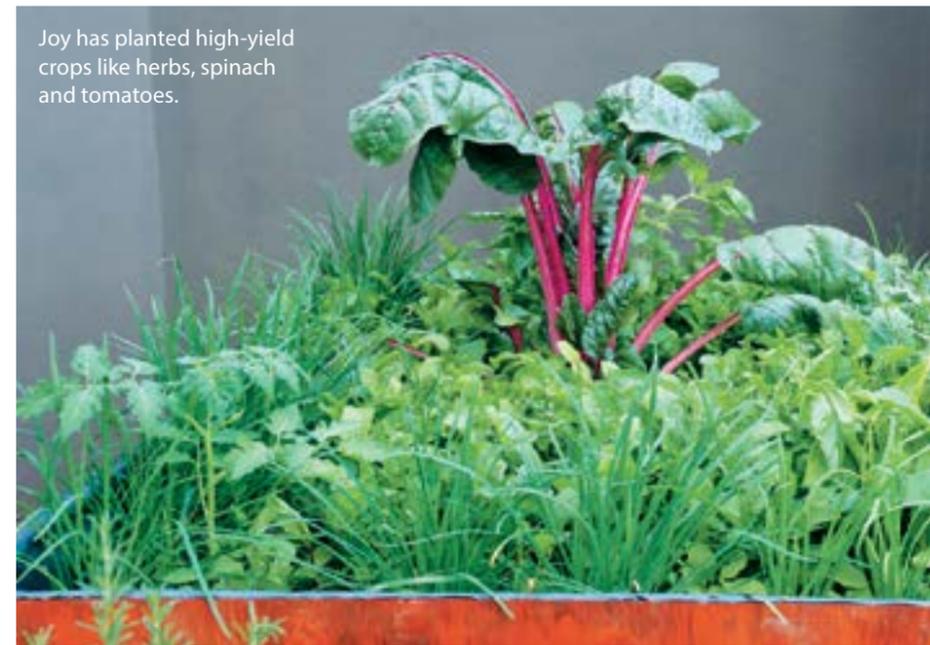
Joy came up with the idea of self-watering containers. These work on the principle of subirrigation. A reservoir is constructed in the base of the container and the reserved water is transferred by osmosis to the plants' roots consistently. “Unlike the drench-and-drain method, subirrigated containers prevent water run-off. As the reservoir isn't exposed, evaporation is minimised. These containers use 60% less water, and the soil remains moist,” says Joy.

Joy's small garden is filled with a variety of containers, including a recycled baby bath her boys have outgrown, that are brimming with cut-and-come again edibles, high-yielding crops of herbs, peppers, eggplants and tomatoes. Wall space is used for trailing beans, cherry tomatoes and cucumbers.

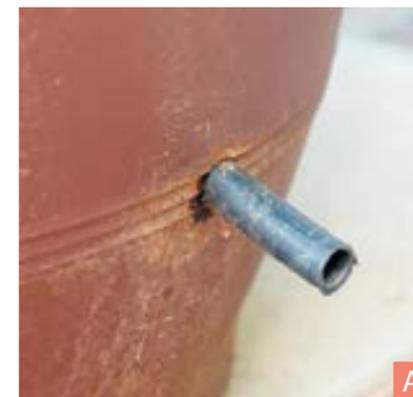
Joy's container garden has proved such a success that it launched her new business, Organic Kitchen Gardens, which installs edible gardens for chefs, restaurants and private homes. “The benefits are huge. Chefs understand that the taste of home-grown vegetables is so much better, plus, with self-watering containers, gardening is far less work.”



Climbing beans grow against the walls of the courtyard.



Joy has planted high-yield crops like herbs, spinach and tomatoes.



JOY'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Seal the holes in the bottom of the container. It needs to be watertight.
2. To prevent waterlogging, the container needs an overflow pipe.
3. Drill a hole in the side of the container, just above where the reservoir will be. Insert a 15cm long piece of tubing into the hole, so 7,5cm is inside and 7,5cm sticks out (A).
4. To make the reservoir, drill small holes all over a couple of plastic bottles (the number will depend on the size of the pot) and place them horizontally to fill about a quarter of the container.
5. Cover the bottles with a layer of shade cloth or weed guard cut to fit the diameter of the pot so it overlaps, preventing soil from seeping

into the reservoir.

6. Make a hole in the fabric and insert a 4cm diameter pipe (B) that's long enough to reach just above the surface of the soil. This is used to fill the reservoir. To prevent mosquitoes breeding, Joy recommends covering the top of the pipe with fabric when not watering.
7. Fill the container with a good quality container mix. Joy uses a combination of potting soil and compost with slow-release organic fertiliser.
8. Plant the seeds or seedlings and fill the reservoir with water. The first time you fill it, it will empty quite quickly as the moisture is transferred to the soil. Fill the reservoir whenever the soil starts drying out. You'll soon get a feel for how often you need to do this. **GH**

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

1. 15cm-long overflow pipe to prevent waterlogging.
2. Plastic bottles to fill the reservoir inside the bottom of the pot to just below the overflow pipe.
3. Shade cloth or weed guard.
4. 4cm diameter watering pipe.

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LET IT *flow*

“Self-watering containers use 60% less water, minimise evaporation and require far less work,” says Joy Phala, who came up with her own design