

# Life's a GARDEN

Anyone can grow a food garden... You don't necessarily need a big space or a lot of technical knowledge – just a willingness to get your hands dirty. We look at three urban gardens and talk to their caretakers about all things green and glorious

TEXT: ROBYN MACLARTY PHOTOS: WALDO SWIEGERS

## JOY PHALA FOUNDER OF ORGANIC KITCHEN GARDENS

Six years or so ago, Joy had a 'management-consulting career focusing on business process re-engineering and change management' – phew. But these days she earns a living designing urban food gardens. Nice work if you can get it!

So how did she do it? A combination of circumstance meeting inspiration. Joy had left work when she became a mother, and her passion for good food and decor blossomed as she pored over magazines and watched TV between feeds (and sleeps!). She decided to grow her own herbs and veg so she could have access to some of the ingredients used in shows like *MasterChef*, and the rest is history.

Her passion for creating gardens that are both

edible and beautiful blossomed (ahem) into a fledgling business, and now Joy's skills are in hot demand – particularly in spring. "There is a great sense of discipline in nature and for me it's more evident in spring than any other time of year. There is a great sense of 'now or never' when the first buds open up, seeds reveal themselves from the ground weeds and the first fragrance is emitted as new flowers bloom. That energy behind the awakening of plants from their winter sleep is mysterious and it just fills me with awe."

Joy's top gardening tip? "Plan, plan and plan some more. A yearly plan that takes into account time to sow seeds, seedlings, time to mature, maintenance, harvest and spatial requirements is a small-space gardener's best friend." [Okitchengardens.com](http://Okitchengardens.com)

"Everything has its time. When it's your time, make the most out of it because winter is guaranteed"







Social auxiliary worker Aipheli Maravha and garden custodian Thulani Mncwango work in Colin House Child and Youth Care Centre in Benoni

## JANE GRIFFITHS URBAN GARDENER, WRITER, ARTIST AND TV PRODUCER

Her bestselling book *Jane's Delicious Garden* caused an urban veg-growing revolution – and it's not hard to see why: her passion is infectious. "When I am asked to fill in 'religion' on a form, I write 'spiritual gardener'," Jane writes. "As I snap off the first asparagus spears of spring (so fresh they still have liquid dripping from them) and crunch them right there in the garden, it is a spiritual moment. The simple process of taking some tiny little seeds that look like grains of sand, putting them in the ground and watching them grow into an abundant feast is miraculous."

Jane first caught the garden bug when she fell in love with Mexican food on a visit to the States in the Nineties. "I knew that if I wanted the anchos, pasillas, habaneros and jalapeños that are so essential for Mexican flavour, I would have to grow them myself." Many mistakes – and even more successes – later, her garden wisdom is formidable.

"If I have learnt anything from my garden, it is this: by giving nature the respect she deserves, by placing her at the centre of things and by observing and learning from her every move, I have not only become a more successful gardener but a much more contented person." [Janesdeliciousgarden.com](http://Janesdeliciousgarden.com)

## ELSIE LABUSCHAGNE DIRECTOR OF GREATER BENONI CHILD WELFARE

Colin House Child and Youth Care Centre in Benoni is a place of safety that forms part of the Greater Benoni Child Welfare, and accommodates 20 children between the ages of 3 and 13 in need of care and protection as they have either been abandoned or physically and emotionally abused or neglected. The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation supports a food garden for the centre, which the kids love, says Greater Benoni Child Welfare director Elsie Labuschagne. "Over weekends, the children tend to it and they like to pick the fresh vegetables such as tomatoes, green beans, carrots and strawberries and eat them on the spot. This also empowers them with life skills and teaches them to be self-sufficient and healthy." The benefits extend far beyond self-sufficiency – research has found that

**"The children like to pick the fresh vegetables such as carrots and strawberries and eat them on the spot"**

gardening can aid the development of both cognitive and social skills in children.

"I love the food garden," says Elsie, "as we can share the fresh produce with some of our foster parents in Daveyton as well, and we teach the children at Colin House CYCC how to start their own gardens and benefit from it. My gain from it is very selfish, as I love the tranquility and sense of achievement I experience when I work in it and sample the vegetables." [Benonichildwelfare.org.za](http://Benonichildwelfare.org.za)



**"After being bundled up for a cold winter, there is nothing like unfurling myself in spring, welcoming the new growth"**