



Girls at Cedara School harvest organic cabbages. Photo: Jessica Dreamtime

For many years, Petronella Gasa has dreamed of establishing a flourishing food garden at her school – Cedara Primary. After attending a 4 day Permaculture Workshop run by SEED in 2008 and many workshops on compost making and companion planting at Dovehouse Organic Farm, she found the inspiration she needed to make her dream come true. Starting small, with the help of the Midlands Meander Association Education Project (MMAEP) and Thatu UK, she designed and prepared a garden using Permaculture principles at the beginning of 2009. By Autumn the garden had already doubled in size due to her hard work!

Cedara School makes use of every opportunity to integrate gardening into the curriculum and children have learnt about pollination, germination, collecting and saving seed and the importance of eating a variety of fresh vegetables. Acquiring knowledge and skills to help them start gardens at home.

In South Africa, an estimated 1.5 million children suffer from malnutrition, 14 million people are vulnerable to food insecurity, and 43% of households suffer from food poverty. At school level, children who are hungry cannot concentrate or perform to their potential. The MMAEP believes firmly that the best way to improve food security is with small gardens, planted with a variety of herbs, food and medicinal plants which produce all year round. Artificial chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides are all based on fossil fuels, which will not last forever, so learning to use renewable resources freely available (leaves, manure, grass, herbs) makes the most sense. Sustainable agricultural practices are needed to protect already scarce water resources, reverse

land degradation and ensure biodiversity. The food garden provides fresh vegetables to supplement the feeding scheme daily and to share with anyone who is unwell.

Linda Zuma Principal of Cedara comments “Every day we are able to give the learners something fresh to eat from the garden. At home they only know fried cabbage and they used to throw out the carrots, broccoli and cauliflower, but now they eat them. The children look so beautiful from this organic food, you can tell they are getting something from this feeding scheme.”

Nowadays, there are numerous compost heaps, a worm farm, a medicinal plant garden and fruit trees at Cedara School. Ex-learners, who helped plant the pumpkins and mielies last year, are all invited back to enjoy the fruits of their labours – by harvesting and sharing the crop together. As a result of Petronella’s enthusiasm everyone gets involved and even during Winter, the garden was producing food and making money by selling fresh vegetables to the community. Once the 2010 harvest has been gathered, there are plans to start a stall outside the school on Saturdays, selling roasted mielies too.

There is no stopping Petronella, a very stylish community hero who has the well being of her school and the families surrounding it, at heart.

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