



Sandy Lewis of the Soil for Life, an NGO based at Constantia/Waldorf relaxes in a chair made from two tyres. She was taking part in a training programme in Genadendal. Behind her a typical RDP house built for the residents.



A young boy demonstrates how by using a bamboo pipe leading from a spring, fresh, uncontaminated water can be obtained.



Inside an RDP house, bamboo has been strung together to make a bed. The bamboo at the top of the bed can be used to hang clothes. The space underneath the bed can be used for storage.

Soil for Life is a lifeline for hundreds of poor families and needs support from the community. This food-growing project has a demonstration vegetable and herb garden and office on the grounds of Constantia Waldorf School. This NGO, which gives people a hand up not hand-out, is made up of a small team headed by Pat Featherstone, Sandy Lewis and Moira Chmielewski who operate from a wooden hut near Lane Stables, in Brounger Way.

For several years, these hardworking women and trainers have taught disadvantaged communities how to grow vegetables in poor soil using water-saving techniques.

They need financial support and one way of giving it to them is by becoming a member: individual and group membership is R100 a year, company membership is R1 000 a year, and for those who earn less than R1 000 a month, it's just R20 a year.

Membership entitles people to basic information and advice on growing vegetables cheaply by water-saving methods. The regular newsletters, edited by Pat, are interesting and informative.

The Soil for Life workshops focus on pest control, organic fertilisers, compost making, vermi-compost, companion planting and simple nursery skills.

When Pat, who lives in Kommeje, began the demonstration gardens at Waldorf Constantia School many years ago, she did not realise what else would blossom as a result of her endeavours.

Pat and her team were involved in a project at Genadendal where they trained trainers from Kleinmond, Alexander Bay, Port Nolloth, Hermanus, Gansbaai, and Hout Bay.

It was organised by Eco-Africa as part of the Coastcare project, and there was plenty to keep the participants interested.

Architect Etienne Bruwer demonstrated building skills that would enable RDP home owners to improve ventilation, lighting and insulation of their houses and increase living space cost effectively with pergolas and plants. The participants were taught to use tyres to make chairs, galvanised iron for shelves and guttering from plastic tubing.

The focus of the three-week programme was on creating a sustainable lifestyle.

Harvesting water was an important part of the demonstration with advice on the location of plants. For instance, planting different plants to protect the walls from the weather.

Even a small detail like growing deciduous plants on the west side instead of the east, can make a difference in the lives of an impoverished community.

In Cape Town, the Soil for Life team has also been involved with the City of Cape Town's economic development scheme in Vrygrond, Dunoon, Manenberg and other poor areas on council-owned land or anywhere there is spare land.

The team's need for dedicated volunteers is never-ending, said Pat.

Pat has plenty of ideas, one is to start a competition for the best vegetable garden established in the disadvantaged communities.

Soil for Life also sells seed for R2.50 a packet to members. Seeds include root crops, leafy vegetables – from kale to New Zealand spinach – tomato, pepper, chile, egg plant through to marrow, squash, peas and beans, and other legumes, which are hardy and suitable for winter rainfall areas.

Pat and her team also do demonstrations for schools and NGOs. If you can help in any way or need more details phone 794 4982.

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to solve hunger**