

FOOD

A SHORT GUIDE TO PLANTING A FOOD GARDEN THROUGHOUT THE YEAR:

Timing is everything. Deciding when to plant to make use of available weather conditions is the first step towards an efficient food garden. Planting at the right time ensures that the plants grow for long enough under the right climatic conditions to produce a suitable crop for harvesting.

However, one should keep in mind that a food garden involves more than just putting seeds into the ground. Preparing the seedbed, selecting seeds, weeding and pest control are all essential for successful crops.

The illustration on the right is intended as a guide to get you started on your vertical garden, rooftop garden or conventional food garden on the ground. Frost is less of a problem in a vertical garden as its temperatures are typically a few degrees higher than those in the soil of ground-level garden.

An example of an asparagus guild: Tomato plants protect asparagus from asparagus beetles, the roots of asparagus kill nematodes which attack tomato roots. Both tomato and asparagus like basil near them, but neither likes to be close to onions.

SPRING

TOMATOES, SWEET PEPPERS, BRASSICAS (CABBAGE, BROCCOLI, CAULIFLOWER, MORO GO)

SUMMER

TOMATOES, SWEET PEPPERS, RUNNER BEANS, EGGPLANT, PUMPKINS, CUCUMBERS, HERBS, POTATOES, ONIONS, CARROTS, BEETROOT

WINTER

BRASSICAS (CABBAGE, BROCCOLI, CAULIFLOWER, MORO GO), ONIONS, CARROTS, BEETROOT, PEAS, GARLIC, SPINACH, LETTUCE

AUTUMN

BRASSICAS (CABBAGE, BROCCOLI, CAULIFLOWER, MORO GO), POTATOES, ONIONS, CARROTS, BEETROOT, PEAS, GARLIC, SPINACH, LETTUCE

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ILLUSTRATION: SERA LOBELO

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Plants are sourced directly from growers around the country, and most of the herbs are grown by the Justins on their plot on Joburg's East Rand

Rooftop garden in Midrand by Vertical Landscapes and Rooftop Landscapes for a private client

ON THE WEB

Food Shed is an online marketplace for small-scale food producers. Exactly like a farmers' market find fabulous food sold direct by local producers in your area. www.foodshed.co.za

Supported by Woolworths, The Siyakhana Initiative for Ecological Health and Food Security offers courses to the public in urban permaculture food gardening. www.siyakhana.org

Urban Sprout is a local green news and opinion site that has a great organic eco-directory that focuses on organic and eco-friendly products, organisations, venues and events. www.urbansprout.co.za

Livingseeds is a local company that specialises in heirloom seeds. They've got a wonderful selection of traditional food seeds and some more unusual ones like herbert oontjies, Maputalan d red peanuts, gooseberries and tomatillos. www.livingseeds.co.za



BOYS ON TOP

Vertical Landscapes and Rooftop Landscapes are two Johannesburg-based landscape engineering companies run by Justin and Justin, two aeronautical engineers who decided to put their larger-than-average brains to good use.

Justin Sam, 31, and Justin Witten, 32, met as colleagues at Denel Aviation. After a few years working on military helicopters they left the local industry, feeling it was limited, and each ventured out on their own, while remaining friends. "Both our fathers are business owners who only have their standard six," says Sam. It's clear from the variety of different businesses that both Justins pursued after Denel, that their entrepreneurial drive is strong.

"I started two township bakeries," says Witten. From guns to cupcakes to gardens, the Justins wanted to do something that utilised their skills, and added value while still being relevant and interesting. Sam says, "I'm Asian and he's coloured and I'm glad we live in this country, time and economy where we can be ambitious and successful." So they started Vertical Landscapes and Rooftop Landscapes in 2009 and 2012 respectively.

Their unique skillset means that from the conceptual, design and engineering phase, all the way to the production and installation stages, they are totally hands on. Bringing in trained labour per project they keep their business agile and innovative.

New products they're working on currently include a portable, battery-operated, self-irrigating herb garden, double-sided planted office dividers and a light-weight rolling mat system to grow grasses on roofs that can't support heavy loads.

Plants are sourced directly from growers around the country and most of the herbs are grown by the Justins on their plot on Joburg's East Rand. The diverse range of herbs they grow would impress the most adventurous chefs: chocolate basil and stevia (the candereel plant) are not generally found on the Woolies shelf next to the rocket and chives.

Developing prototypes, engineering solutions and beautifying the urban landscape with custom-designed vertical and rooftop gardens is the ultimate vision and mission of these two bright, young minds.

Contact Justin Sam on 073 486 6288 or email justin@verticallandscapes.co.za

PHOTOGRAPHY GARETH JACOBS