

GARDENING

Workshop aims to uplift small-scale farmers and alleviate poverty

NKULULEKO NENE

A GROUP of international tourists conducted a week-long gardening workshop aimed at uplifting small-scale crop growers. The group from various countries, including the US, Canada and Britain, encouraged locals to make optimum use of their backyards to grow fresh, organic food and alleviate poverty in the process.

Working in partnership with Amanzimtoti-based garden trainers Dan and Kerry Wiens, the team offered gardening tips that were modern and not harmful to the environment. For example, instead of burning grass to prepare a garden plot, rather cut the grass and use it for moisture and shade on new crops.

The Wiens, who run Farming God's Way Network, an organisation that focused on biblical teachings related to farming, advised the community to grow leafy vegetables instead of only planting root-based vegetables and mielies.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HARVEST

- Horse dropping and sawdust particles as compost.
- Turn the compost regularly to keep nutrients alive.
- Plant marigolds to attract flies for pollination.
- Plant onions around the garden to keep away unwanted insects, which feed on the leaves.



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They said alternating the type of crops ensured that the soil remained fertile and sustainable. They also stressed the importance of a healthy balanced diet, and thus encouraged a mixture of spinach, lettuce, potatoes and beetroot.

About 20 locals from Dassenhoek, near Pinetown attended the workshop on Wednesday.

Among them was Purity Zama Ngubane, 29, a farmer who trained at Cedara in Howick. Ngubane's garden plot was situated at the South African National Defence Force High-

way Command site on the N3, where she grew a variety of vegetables and herbs.

Ngubane said she would like more people to join the initiative rather than being dependent on handouts.

"People like begging, but if we can all realise how much potential we have to turn things around that mentality could change for the better. God has given us soil, water, plants and insects to cross pollinate our crops. We just need to use them in the best possible way." Ngubane's success story began

when she approached retired soldier's William Bill Pirrie, 62, former SANDF lieutenant-colonel and chairperson of the Highway Commando Association and former regimental sergeant major Charles Wilson, 79, to help start her garden.

The Highway Commando Association had run Uthingo Organic Farming. Pirrie said Ngubane, who had shown great passion, was sponsored by their organisation to complete her agriculture qualification.

"She opened our minds when she joined us four months ago. But the primary objective was to provide healthy food for the less privileged." Wilson, who was the maintenance manager, said the garden at their camp provided staff with vegetables to feed their families.

"Every Friday they take home freshly harvested veggies to feed their families. They also benefit through (having) skills in the garden. Others have started small crops in their backyards." The workshop ended on Saturday.



Farmer Purity Ngubane (fourth from right) with workers at their Highway Command garden. Boxed far left are former Lieutenant-Colonel William Bill Pirrie and Regimental Sergeant-Major Charles Wilson, of Uthingo Organic Farming.
PICTURES: NKULULEKO NENE