

AUTUMN 2006

A quarterly newsletter for, and about, the people with their hands in the soil

In this edition...

- **What to plant** for an Autumn and Winter harvest
- **How to Grow ...**
CM Kale
- **News and Inspiration**
- **Ways to be Water Wise**
Aquatrap and other ways of using tyres
- **Bug Watch:** competition
- **Tips for more successful (and cheaper) gardening:**
More about seed-saving
Some tips for winter growing
- **Don't Waste:**
Orange mesh bags
- **Recipes for the Home Gardener**
Preserves/Using eggplants
- **Soil for Life—3 years old!**
- **World Health Day -7th April**

OUR CONTACT DETAILS

If you would like more information, please contact one of us:

Pat Featherstone

Cell: (082) 781 4250

Sheila Van Hougenhouck-Tulleken

Phone: (021) 794 4982

Sandy Lewis

Cell: (083) 734 0399

Fabian Harms

Cell: (082) 770 0823

Mildred Nyembezi

Phone: (073) 334 2932

Nokwanda Mgweto

Phone: (083) 509 1625

Sindiswa Mahuza

Phone: (076) 828 2483

Edith Mwezo

Phone: (021) 794 4982

OUR BANK DETAILS

Soil for Life, ABSA (Wynberg),
Account number 405 685 5300

Remember to fax us the deposit slip

EDITORIAL STAFF:

Editor: Pat Featherstone
Layout: Fabian Harms
Artwork: Leah Hawker

(Incorporating Operation Grow)

SOIL FOR LIFE

Build the soil, grow the plants, feed the people, heal the planet.

NEWSLETTER No. 7

Don't blame the Post Office for non-delivery of your newsletter, or the gale-force south-easter for ripping it out of your post box. It was my fault entirely, and I apologise to all our members for not getting the last few editions off my desk. No excuses are good enough. However it is cheering to know that so many people missed the 'news' and have phoned in to find out what had happened. Thank you for bearing with us, and we'll make it up to you by not only catching up the backlog, but also by posting to those who have not yet renewed their subscriptions. Our intention was to produce a seasonal edition – one every three months. So, to make good with you all, we shall be producing it every two months in 2006 and into 2007. Phew!



If you're interested in some additional 'green' gardening information, Soil for Life has a regular article in the Biophile magazine (edition 7 excepted). This publication is a must for everybody concerned with their own health and wellbeing, and that of our ailing planet. I strongly urge you to buy a copy from your local health shop; read it from cover to cover, act on what you read, and share your copy with as many people as possible.

There are many changes at the Soil for Life offices, and to accommodate some extra staff we have had to turn the storage shed into an office. Moira, our very competent bookkeeper and office manager, has been ill and is now taking a more relaxed perspective on her work from her home office. She is still doing our books, but will no longer be answering the telephone and dealing with the myriad queries that come through the switchboard and the front door on a daily basis. Sheila van Hougenhouck-Tulleken is running the office and hammering bits of wood together into all sorts of useful office items. Caro has gone back to Johannesburg to be with her family and Sandy has come 'home' after an eleven month sojourn. We're also very pleased to have Sindi Mahuza as part of our training and fieldwork team.

We are looking forward to a productive year, with our new programme 'While our gardens grow...' being launched in Mitchell's Plain and Gugulethu. Watch future newsletters for its unfolding.

Happy food gardening to you all, and remember to pass on *the* message to your neighbours and friends..... **To all who must eat to live, there is hope. Grow your own food. It's the simplest (and cheapest) way to good health.**

Pat

P.S. All you aspiring food gardeners ...

We're having a **Weekend Workshop** at the Soil for Life Resource Centre on the 22nd and 23rd April (8.30am to 3.30pm both days). The cost is R450 per person (SFL members get a small discount). Phone Sheila (021-794 4982) for details, and to book your place. We can take a maximum of twenty people.

PLANT YOUR GARDEN FOR AN AUTUMN AND WINTER HARVEST

This planting guide is for areas in the Western Cape.

Remember to plant seeds early – the growing season in the winter rainfall areas is short.

What Seeds to Sow: March

Winter rainfall areas: Amaranth morog, beetroot, brinjal, , broccoli, bush beans, cabbage, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, carrots, celery, CM kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, leaf mustard, New Zealand Spinach, parsley, radish, soya beans, spinach, sunflowers, turnips.

Summer rainfall areas: Beetroot, broad beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, CM kale, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, Lucerne, onion, peas, radish, spinach, turnip.

What seeds to sow: April

Winter rainfall areas: Carrot, beetroot, turnip, radish, onion, leeks, spinach, CM kale, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, broad beans, peas, Lucerne, parsley.

Summer rainfall areas: Carrot, beetroot, turnip, radish, onion, spinach, CM kale, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, broad beans, peas, Lucerne.

What seeds to sow: May

Winter rainfall areas: Carrot, turnip, radish, onion, leeks, spinach, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, broad beans, peas, Lucerne, parsley.

Summer rainfall areas: Turnip, radish, onion, spinach, CM kale, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Chinese cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, broad beans, peas.

Seeds for most of these vegetables are available at R2.50 a packet (plus postage) for Soil for Life members.



How to grow...

CM (CHOU MOELLIER) KALE

(also known as marrow stem kale)

Not many people in South Africa are familiar with this highly nutritious member of the cabbage (Brassica) family. CM kale is rich in thiamine and Vitamins A and C (even more Vitamin C than orange juice) and is grown for its leaves. It has been cultivated in Europe for a very long time, mainly as a fodder crop for cattle and poultry, but also as a food crop and it's also very popular in African countries to the north of us.

CM kale is a hardy annual which can grow up to 2 metres high. It has a thick stem and large dark green leaves and, unlike cabbage and cauliflower, it does not form heads or edible flowers. It goes on growing for a long time while you pick off the lowest leaves while they are young and tender, whenever you want a meal. Cook them the same as cabbage, or chop it up and add them to soups and stews.

When the plant starts going to seed, pull it out and save the thick stalks for eating. The lower part can be peeled, sliced thinly and then cooked; the upper part is delicious if you peel it and eat it raw. Don't forget to leave the healthiest plant to go to seed so that you can save some seeds for next year's crop.

Members of the cabbage family are heavy feeders so make sure that you apply a top dressing of compost as soon as the plants are well established. Sprinkle old manure or compost on the soil around the plants once a month and give a feed of liquid manure once a week. Keep the plants well watered and mulched; keep adding mulch as the plants grow. Add crushed egg shells or agricultural lime to the soil before planting as the cabbage family likes a bit of lime.

Pests and diseases which attack the cabbage family

Kale is attacked by the same pests and diseases as the other brassicas. The most important are Black Rot and Soft Rot. Both are caused by bacteria and there are no ways to control these. However, avoid diseases by rotating your crops. Never plant them where another member of the cabbage family has just been grown and make sure the plants are spaced properly so that air can circulate freely around them

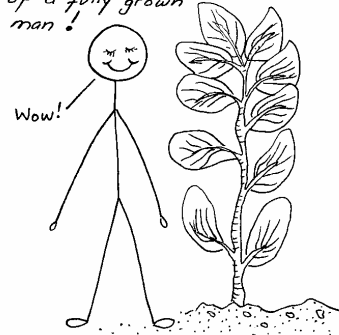
Watch out for the cabbage white butterfly. If this pest attacks your plants, wipe the leaves with sour milk or sprinkle a mixture of flour and salt on the wet plants.

Have you ever tried kohlrabi? It's also a member of the cabbage family.

Kohlrabi is like kale, but with a shortened stem and it is also referred to as an 'aerial turnip'. When young, it is a tasty vegetable and is readily acceptable as a fodder crop. It matures quickly – is ready to eat 8 to 10 weeks after germination. It is at its best and tastiest when the 'ball' at the base of the stem is a little smaller than a tennis ball. It gets tough when it's bigger.

Peel, slice and cook kohlrabi in very little water, or slice it thin and eat it raw. You'll enjoy it.

They can grow to the height of a fully grown man!



TIPS FOR MORE SUCCESSFUL (AND CHEAPER) GARDENING

Some more hints for successful seed saving.

One of the problems with saving your own seed is that many crops cross-pollinate. For example in the squash family, crosses occur between the different types that are flowering at the same time in your (or your neighbour's garden). This means that when you come to grow from your seed in the next season, you come up with some weird and wonderful looking crops that don't look like the plants in the previous season.

However there are a number of vegetables that self-pollinate - lettuce, tomatoes, peas and beans. So give these a try.

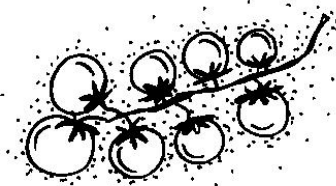


Beans and peas (including broad beans)

The first pods produced by bean plants are the best for future cultivation. Mark them with a piece of string and let them mature on the plant.

Once the pods are mature, pull up the whole plant and hang it in an airy place, out of the sun. It is better to store these seeds in the dried pods (just store all the pods in containers before they pop). Watch out for signs of insect attack—discard any affected pods.

Tomato seeds (also baby marrow, cucumbers, pumpkin, butternut and gem squash)



Leave the fruit to fully ripen on the plant. Pick and store on a window sill until over-ripe (soft and mushy). Cut the fruit open and scoop out the seeds into a container of warm water.

After a few days, the water will go murky and smelly. We say that the mixture is fermenting. Pour the mixture into a sieve and wash well with clean water to remove all the pulp. Put the cleaned seeds onto a piece of cloth (cotton) and let them dry before storing.

This method is also good for granadilla seeds.

Another quick and easy method of dealing with small sticky seeds is to smear them onto newspaper. Allow the seeds to dry before folding the paper up. Label the seed pack, and dry.

With the cold winter weather around the corner, give your plants a bit of extra care:

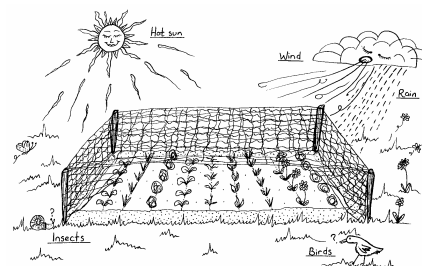
- Plant your autumn and winter crops near a north-facing wall. The

Don't waste...

..orange mesh bags

Fruit and vegetables are packed in these bags before being sent to the market. If you buy fresh produce in bulk, you'll be familiar with them. Most end up in the garbage can. What a waste when they can be used in so many different ways in your home and garden.

- Cut the bags open and stitch them together with old baling twine (we have lots of it to give away) and a darning needle, into a large shade net – about 3 metres long and 2 metres wide. This is ideal for covering and protecting your door-size beds.



- Make a fertiliser bag and take your plants to "tea". This is a great way to keep your plants healthy, and compost tea actually helps with controlling pests and disease.
- Loosely pack fresh summer herbs into an orange mesh bag and tie them up to dry in an airy place. The herbs will be ready in 2-3 days. Crush them into a clean dry container and store in a cool, dark, dry place.
- Keep a bag in the shower and give yourself a good scrub everyday to remove all those dead skin cells. You'll feel like a million dollars.
- Try using a bag to scour the remains of your breakfast porridge out of the pot.

RECIPES

for the Home Gardener

Preserve your summer surplus, and enjoy it through the year.

Ratatouille Chutney

This recipe will use a lot of your late summer produce to make a delicious and colourful preserve. Eat it with roasted meat and vegetables, bread and cheese or add it to cottage cheese to make a chunky dip.

1 kg tomatoes, peeled and chopped
350g onions, finely chopped
350g brinjals, finely diced
350g baby marrows (courgettes), finely diced
350g red peppers, cored, de-seeded and finely diced
3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
1¼ tablespoon coriander seeds
1 tablespoon salt
350g sugar
300ml brown grape vinegar

- Toast the coriander seeds in a heavy-based pan for 1 – 2 minutes over a low heat. Remove the seeds from the pan and crush them lightly with the end of a rolling pin. Set them aside.
- Gently heat the vegetables, garlic, spices and salt in a covered pot for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally until the juices run.
- Uncover, bring to the boil and then simmer gently until the vegetables are soft and most of the liquid has evaporated.
- Over a low heat, stir in the sugar and vinegar until the sugar has dissolved and then simmer until the chutney is very thick and there is no free liquid.
- Ladle the mixture into the hot sterilised jars, then seal. The chutney will be ready to eat in one month.

NEWS AND INSPIRATION

So many people wanted the vegetables that they had to auction them off.

The vegetables coming from the organic food garden at the Haven of Hope Support Group in Retreat are seemingly the most sought after veggies in the community. When Adnan, Leon and Nikki were ready to sell them there were so many buyers that they were forced to auction them at the Square Hill School Fair. The highest bid for a box of veggies was R100. Not bad. It just goes to show that with a bit of effort, and the right approach to marketing, a food garden can make some money for the gardeners.

The Haven of Hope's success story goes a little further. Adnan, with Leon's and Nikki's help, runs the HIV/AIDS support group in Retreat. It offers people the opportunity to share their experiences and to help each other through the trials of living with HIV and AIDS, and encourages a healthy lifestyle to boost the



immune system and people's feelings of self-worth.

Adnan says that, at first, he thought it was a contradiction to tell the patients that they needed to be eating fresh organic vegetables to improve their health when 99% of the support group members are unemployed, and survive on the contents of periodic food parcels. It was when he discovered the work of Soil for Life through Zainu Gabriels of the City of Cape Town that he realised that there is a cheap and easy way to grow a variety of nutrient-rich, fresh vegetables. Once he had acquired a small piece of land at Square Hill Primary School in Concert Boulevard, the group was trained and the rest is history.

The school and its learners have supported the project with interest and, because of limited space, Adnan has extended the growing to his own garden.

We salute you, Adnan, Leon and Nikki, and wish you well with your efforts to inspire the community, to create health and abundance, and to make the world a better place.

Hazeldene Primary School, Mitchell's Plain

Many schools in Cape Town have large tracts of unused land and have made it possible for people from the communities to use them for growing food. There are many benefits attached to this. The gardens provide healthy, fresh food, supply soup kitchens, generate income for the gardeners, and teach learners vital life skills. Hazeldene Primary School is a fine example of what can be done. They have a truly stunning garden.

Mr George Ford, together with the community and the school's staff, has created this oasis in Mitchell's Plain; there are vegetables, flowers and indigenous plants, and plenty of examples of how to fashion recycled materials into bed borders and benches, among other things.

This garden also serves as a classroom. Besides learning the most important lesson in life—how to grow your own safe food—the children also experience and enjoy the relaxing energy that the garden radiates.

If you come anywhere close to the area then paying it a visit is a must. Of course the garden is conveniently exposed to the public and can be admired, even after hours.

What a time we've had making jams and preserves.

Soil for Life has run a number of food processing workshops in the last nine months. It's been quite a challenge operating a make-shift kitchen in community halls and classrooms, but it's been great fun watching people turn their excess garden produce into jams, curds, pickles and chutneys. We're looking forward to being able to help people market their wares through local outlets once they have perfected the art getting their jam to set.



The group of ladies in the picture were from the Weltevreden Community Centre in Mitchell's Plain. They gave Edith (third from the right) and I quite a run for our money!

Edith Mwezo from Masihlume Soup Kitchen in Driftsands has become a dab hand at jam- and muffin-making. She has been assisting us with the training, and is also producing lemon cordial, rose geranium punch (her own favourite recipe), and other refreshments for Soil for Life workshops. It all helps to increase the income for the kitchen, and enables the group to maintain the measure of independence they have achieved over the past six months

Congratulations, Shadrak.

Mr Shadrak Jaxa of Noluthando Senior's Club in Gugulethu was the winner of the Soil for Life food gardening competition (*Vegetable Gardens For All*) held for local gardeners at the end of 2005. His garden is outstanding and is proof that, with proper care and attention, plants will thrive. His innovative curved trench beds made good use of his garden space. Well done Shadrak. He received his prize at the Soil for Life Annual General Meeting and celebration held at Siseko Educare Centre.

Thank you to Mrs Audrey Booi for hosting the occasion for us, and to Woolworths, Constantia for helping us so generously with the food.

Masihlume Soup Kitchen was launched in October

The ladies of Masizame Women's group have done the most amazing job of setting up and running a soup kitchen attached to their two vegetable gardens. You may have seen them on Sunday, 18th



September on SABC 3 on the programme *Free Spirit*.

Their story goes back to the 'eighties; their vision goes well into the future. They have done so much with so little money, and we invite you to pay them a visit to celebrate their success .

MORE RECIPES

Vegetable pickle

An atchar-type condiment that's great with curries and sandwiches

- 30 ml olive oil
- 3 large onions, grated
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 30 ml curry paste or powder
- 5 ml turmeric
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon caraway seeds
- 1½ tablespoons white mustard seeds
- 10 carrots, grated
- 300 g cauliflower, broken into small florets
- 10 baby marrows (courgettes), grated
- 600 ml white grape vinegar
- 4 tablespoons of sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 3 tablespoon hot mustard powder
- 300 ml water

- Heat the oil in a large, heavy bottomed pan. Sauté the onions until translucent, add the garlic, curry powder and spices and cook gently for two minutes to allow the flavours to develop.
- Add the vegetables and simmer until soft.
- Add the vinegar, sugar, salt, mustard powder and water. Simmer gently until most of the liquid has evaporated and the mixture is thick.
- Ladle into clean, dry jars and seal whilst still hot.
- The pickle will be ready to eat after about 6 weeks.



MORE RECIPES

Whoever heard of Butternut jam?

*Beautiful, bright orange jam,
flecked with red chillies.*

*Delicious to eat on hot toast,
wholewheat scones, or with
cheese sandwiches.*

1½ kg peeled and finely diced
(or grated) butternut

12, or more, fresh red chillies,
de-seeded, and very finely
chopped

1½ kg white sugar

Juice of three lemons

250ml (1 cup) water

- Simmer the butternut, water and lemon juice with the lid on until the butternut is soft and most of the liquid has evaporated. You may need to add more water—a little at a time to prevent burning.
- Add the finely-chopped chillies towards the end of the cooking time.
- Add all the sugar and stir over a low heat until dissolved.
- Bring to the boil, stirring, and boil steadily until setting point is reached. See box below.
- Remove pan from heat. Skim off any scum and leave jam to cool off slightly.
- Pour the jam into clean, dry, hot jars, and seal immediately. (Makes approximately 2½ kg)



There are two ways to test whether the jam is ready:

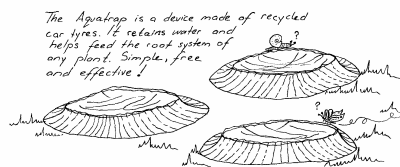
* The 'wrinkle' test. Place a little jam on a cold saucer and leave it for about 30 seconds. Push with your finger. If wrinkles form the jam is done.

* Use a sugar thermometer. The temperature of the jam should be 5°C higher than that of boiling water.

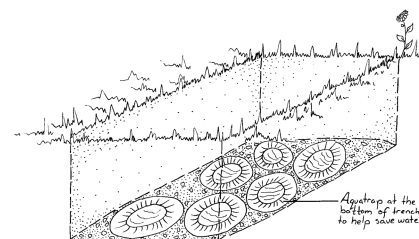
WAYS TO BE WATER-WISE

The aquatrap – an economical solution to water conservation

South African, Mark Algra, has introduced the idea of burying horizontally slit tyres below the soil to conserve water. He first saw this practice in the desert areas in America, and where it is also used to conserve water on golf courses.



to create a simply ingenious device for preventing water from draining too quickly from the upper layers of the soil and away from plant roots, leaching essential nutrients with it. Mark has encouraged community groups to manufacture the Aquatraps, and to use them in vegetable gardens on the Cape Flats where sandy soil makes it very difficult to grow food crops.



And while we're on the subject of tyres...

Fashion a fish pond, or entice bug-catching frogs to the veggie patch.

Tractor, or motor car, tyres stacked on one another, or sunk into the ground make an ideal pond or water feature in a garden. Just use your imagination. Line with 4mm black plastic (cut to at least twice the size of the tyre structure) and fill with water. Add a few fish or water plants after a few days, or leave it to nature to supply the creatures. They'll come, that's for sure. Frog, and their insatiable appetites for bugs, are excellent allies in the garden.

Hold back the soil on the slopes and prevent soil erosion.

Instead of spending hard-earned money on concrete blocks to shore up the terraces in a garden, arrange all the tyres you can collect in the same way you would the blocks. Fill them with good soil and plant creeping herbs, New Zealand Spinach, comfrey, Bulbine and vygies.

Chopped tyres are being used as a mulch.

But, be careful! With our concern over reducing water consumption in the garden we are being urged to mulch. However shredded tyres must be used with discretion. Yes, a shredded tyre mulch does not blow away, does not break down and helps to control weeds, **but** tyre rubber leaches zinc into the soil. This is made worse by acidic soils with a pH of 6.5 or less and may affect growth in plants such as cabbage, tomatoes and beans which are zinc-sensitive.

It is advisable to test your soil and, where tyres are planned as containers, paint them first, inside and out, with a good quality latex paint. Instead of tyre mulch, use what you can find in the way of dry grass, wood chips, paper, cardboard and partially composted household and garden waste. The tyres can then be used for other things like children's swings, shoe soles, door mats and for building houses.

BUG WATCH

Controlling pests and diseases the natural way.

With the change of season, and plants losing their vigour, a number of pests and diseases appear in the garden. Downy mildew becomes a problem on the leaves of squash plants; aphids attack the cabbages and the cabbage white butterfly flutters around the veggie beds unconcerned by temperature changes. For tips on how to handle these problems, refer to previous editions of our newsletter.

Remember that 'it all begins with the soil' - *healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy people.*

Spot the bug tips and win a prize!

And, just to keep you on your toes, there are at least *seven* ideas in this newsletter (number 7) for controlling pests and diseases in your garden. There is a prize for the first person to phone in, or to e-mail us, with all seven tips, *excluding* the tips in this column, page 7. If you get them all right, Sheila (the new lady in our front office) will post your prize to you immediately.

Watch out for red spider mite.

It is a common pest especially in times of drought, when plants are stressed by a lack of water. The mites are very tiny, are often red, and spin silken webs on the under surface of leaves which appear speckled with grey or white. As the mites suck the plant juices, the leaves wilt and drop off, generally weakening the plants.

The easiest way to control the mite is to hose down your plants (especially the underside of leaves), and to mist spray them daily to prevent them from reproducing. Mites hate damp conditions.

Plants growing in very hot spots in your garden which trap the sun, and where heat is reflected off white garden walls, are most likely to get attacked by spider mites.

Catch those grasshoppers before they lay their eggs. In late summer the females deposit long masses of eggs in the soil to over-winter. In Spring the little hoppers emerge to feast on your plants. Make a net from an orange mesh bag, sew it onto a stick and swoop it on the unsuspecting blighters before they have a chance to get away. Feed them to the chickens.

Soil for Life turns 3 years old.

We've come a long way, learned a lot of lessons, and made many valuable and wonderful friends. It hasn't always been easy, but we've loved every minute of it and are looking forward to many more years with our hands in the soil with you all.

There hasn't been time to sit and eat birthday cake, but maybe we'll celebrate the successes with you at our AGM later in the year. We're planning to have it early. Look out for the invitation in one of the newsletters.

Thank you all for walking the food garden path with us.



Some recipe ideas from around the world using egg-plants (brinjals):

Ratatouille (a French dish) is a delicious vegetable stew made of eggplant (brinjal), baby marrow, tomatoes, onion, green pepper, herbs and garlic. Delicious eaten hot or cold, with pasta, rice or baked potato.

The Italians make a vegetarian **Lasagne** using eggplant instead of meat. Much cheaper, of course.

Greek **Moussaka** combines eggplant and minced lamb.

Melitzano salata is a Greek dip made from eggplant, onions, vinegar, sugar and garlic. Divine on hot toast or with strips of carrot and cucumber.

The Iranians make a tasty lamb stew, with much the same ingredients as ratatouille, but with the addition of cubes of lamb.

The Americans came up with an eggplant **pizza**; slices of grilled eggplant topped with onion, tomato, herbs and cheese, popped under the grill to brown.

Eggplant makes a good and cheap substitute for meat, or if combined in a meat dish makes costly meat go further.

Tips for cooking eggplants:

Lots of recipes calling for eggplant suggest that you peel them and then soak them in salt water before cooking. This is not necessary. However, aluminium cooking utensils will turn them brown. Try and use stainless steel, enamel or glass cookware.

It's ...



*What are **you** doing about your health?*

We say:

*To all who must eat to live, there is hope.
Grow your own food.
It's the simplest (and cheapest) way to good health.*