

LAND OF *plenty*

A property in the heart of the Constantia Winelands has been given new life as an abundant food garden, thanks to the inspired vision of its owners

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THE GARDEN WAS DESIGNED WITH GREAT ATTENTION TO HOW ONE EXPERIENCES AND USES IT, WITH LOW STONE PLANTERS, WOODEN VEGETABLE SUPPORTS AND 'KLOMPIE' BRICK EDGING ADDING VISUAL HARMONY



A GLASS PAVILION ALLOWS A SPECTACULAR VANTAGE POINT OVER THE GARDEN, FROM OLD, FRUIT-BEARING GUAVA TREES AND TURKISH FIGS TUMBLING OVER LEANING WOODEN SUPPORTS, TO EXPANSIVE VIEWS OF THE CONSTANTIBERG MOUNTAINS BEYOND. THE FIGS ARE UNDERPLANTED WITH CAREX GRASS, AND ARTICHOKE AND ONIONS BECOME EDIBLE GROUND COVER BENEATH THE GUAVA TREE

The genesis of this vegetable garden was a very clear brief: To create a food garden and entertainment pavilion for long, lazy lunches with family and friends. A collaboration between garden designer Franchesca Watson and architecture firm Malherbe Rust resulted in a vegetable, herb and flower garden with strong architectural lines, just glamorous enough not to detract from the rural comfort that is at its heart. The pavilion, too – conceptualised as a glass cube – sets up just the right amount of tension between pastoral harmony and 21st-century living.

‘We visually anchored the glass pavilion by placing a lily pond on either side of it,’ says Franchesca. The rill was painted in a chalky white as a nod to the traditional Dutch farming irrigation practices of the area, and positioned centrally as a device to draw the eye through the garden and up towards the sweeping, 360-degree views of the surrounding Constantiaberg mountains. ‘The rill was built so as to appear infinite, with the pond into which it flows tucked away at the base of a low retaining wall. This clever addition disguises a tricky level change and visually separates the garden from the nearby driveway.’

A water channel with custom-designed fountains bisects the garden and creates a visual axis from the homestead down one of the main pathways, connecting it to the newly created vegetable garden. Plant supports in the form of ‘latte’ planting frames; pathways defined by ‘klompie’ brick edging; raised planters for herbs, edible nasturtium and pelargonium flowers; and established guava and almond trees all add a three-dimensional quality to the garden.

‘The beds are planted with an array of seasonal vegetables for a year-round harvest of fresh produce,’ explains the homeowner. Family favourites from the garden include a selection of onions; Mediterranean varieties such as artichokes, lemon thyme and rosemary; Thai basil; roses; blueberries; and edible viola flowers.

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PERFUME LINGERS IN THE AIR AS ONE WALKS PAST OBELISKS LADEN WITH THE SOFT-PINK, CLIMBING ROSA 'CÉCILE BRÜNNER', EDIBLE NASTURTIUMS, LEMON BLOSSOM AND ROSEMARY

Pick of the Crop

Our tried-and-tested top five vegetable varieties for beginner growers:

Lettuce: Fast-growing and a piece of cake to harvest – simply snip off the tops or pick leaves as needed. Lettuce can be grown in containers accompanied by flowers or other small-space herbs, such as chives or parsley. We had success directly seeding them even in partly shady areas. Better still, they continue to grow after picking, so you can harvest them again and again. Our favourite lettuce was Merveille des Quatres Saisons, an unusual French variety of butter lettuce with red-tipped leaves and tightly folded green hearts. Available online from *The Gravel Garden*.

Radishes: Once you see how easy radishes are to grow from seed, you'll simply have to

add them to your repertoire – and they took only 20 days to reach full size. Sow throughout summer for a succession of crunchy, colourful crops. We especially loved Watermelon Radish for its unusual white outer and deep-red centre. It had masses of peppery flavour, too. Available online from *Seeds for Africa*.

Baby tomatoes: One of the most popular vegetables for any size garden, you can grow tomatoes in hanging baskets, pots or anywhere they'll get lots of sun and have support for their stems. Use bamboo canes (readily available from your local nursery) as support. Our favourite variety for deep, dark colour drama and sublime taste is Black Cherry. Available online from *The Gravel Garden*.

Beans: Support your beans with canes or a mini trellis, and before you know it, you will be harvesting a bumper crop of fresh beans with a flavour that puts

supermarket varieties to shame. And the more you pick, the more they produce. Our top pick was the Royalty Purple bush bean, which is bright purple, stringless and has a great flavour raw or cooked. Be warned though: When cooking it changes colour from purple to green. Available online from *Organic Seeds*.

Beetroot: A cinch to grow in full sun, your beetroot will be ready to harvest from six weeks and is as happy growing in a pot (provided it's more than 30cm deep and wide) as in the ground. Both the leaves and the fleshy roots are edible, making this vegetable exceptionally productive for small spaces. Varieties range from those with deep crimson roots to ones with golden-yellow and red-and-white roots. We tried Tonda Di Chioggia, which has a candy-striped centre and nutty, earthy taste profile, winning our best juicing vegetable award. Available from *Sought After Seedlings*.



A RIOT OF FLOWERING BLOOMS ATTRACT POLLINATORS TO THE GARDEN: MASSES OF GAURA LINDHEIMERI IN MARSHMALLOW SHADES, A MIX OF SALVIA VARIETIES, AND EDIBLE BLOOMS SUCH AS VIOLA AND PANSIES

Feast of Flowers

Our handpicked selection of grow-your-own edible flowers for summer salads, pastas and delicately flavoured sorbets and syrups.

ROSE Blossoms have a delicate flavour profile from mint to sweet spice, strawberry and apple. Remove the white portion of the petal before eating, as it is bitter.

VIOLA Sweet, perfumed and pretty on cakes. Heart-shaped leaves are edible and, when cooked, resemble spinach in taste.

NASTURTIUMS Sweet, tangy flavour. Leaves are peppery and delicious in salads. A good companion in the vegetable garden for attracting whitefly.

WATERBLOMMETJIE Unique to South Africa, this bloom is wonderfully fragranced and has a subtle, lemony taste.

LAVENDER Add a sprig or two to your sugar bowl for a floral, apple-like flavour.

GARLIC CHIVES All parts of this plant are edible. The taste is of delicate onion and garlic, a more robust flavour to the flowering seeds. Can be planted among roses to keep aphids away and to resist the disease Blackspot.

GERANIUM Flavour depends on the variety, and ranges from citrus to spice and rose.

MARIGOLDS These pretty plants have a spicy, peppery flavour. Plant as companions in the vegetable garden for attracting pests away from your vegetable crop.

BORAGE Lovely, blue, star-shaped flower with a cool cucumber taste.

THYME The flowers have a milder flavour than the leaves and are particularly suited to enhance meat and a variety of drinks, and to garnish cakes.



FENNEL



FRUITING QUINCE



EUREKA LEMON



FORELLE PEAR



FRAGARIA STRAWBERRY



ARTICHOKE



OBELISKS TO SUPPORT BEANS AND TOMATOES

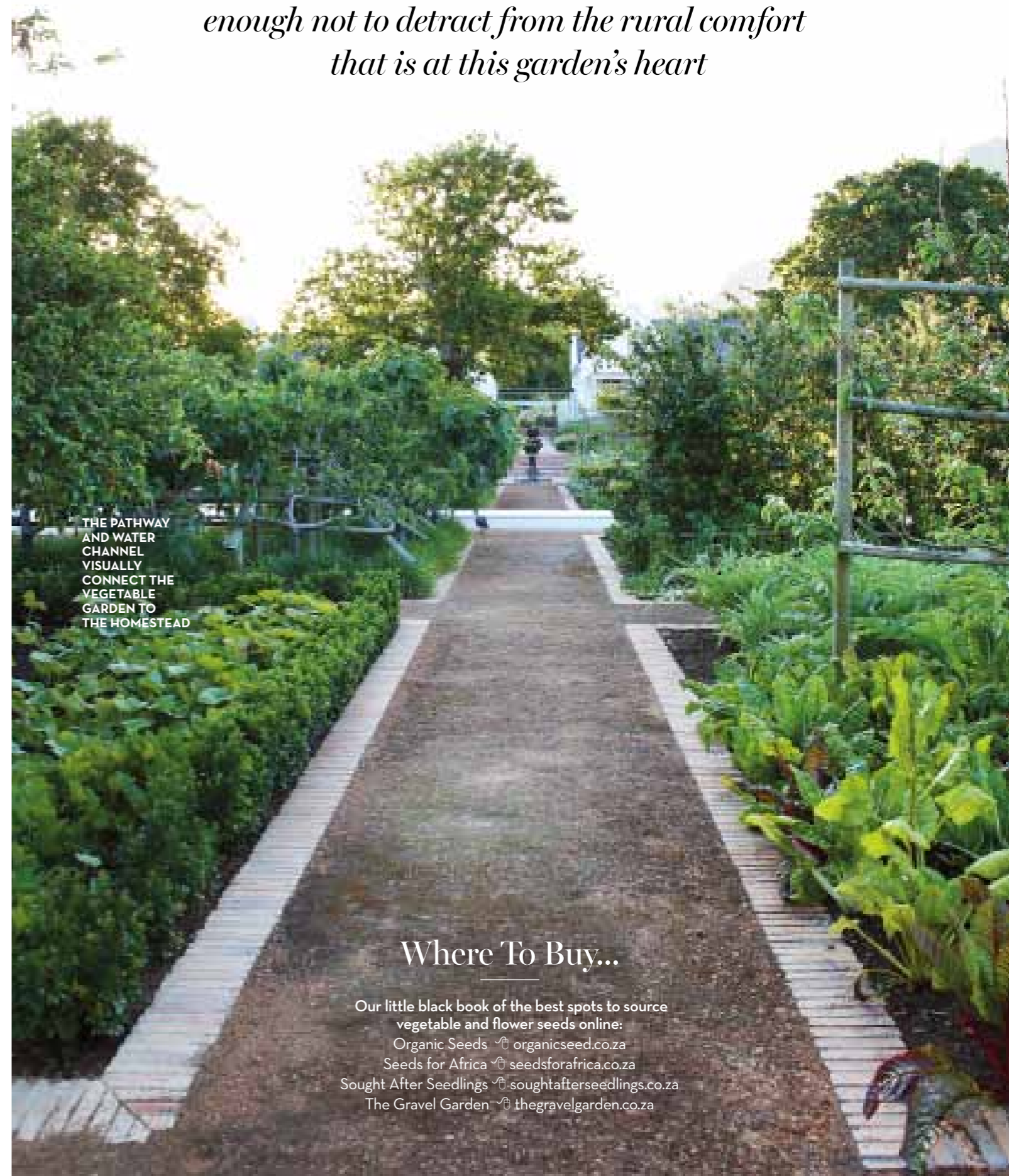


BLUEBERRIES



COURGETTE FRUIT AND FLOWER

Strong architectural lines are just glamorous enough not to detract from the rural comfort that is at this garden's heart



THE PATHWAY AND WATER CHANNEL VISUALLY CONNECT THE VEGETABLE GARDEN TO THE HOMESTEAD

Where To Buy...

Our little black book of the best spots to source vegetable and flower seeds online:
Organic Seeds organicseed.co.za
Seeds for Africa seedsforafrica.co.za
Sought After Seedlings soughtafterseedlings.co.za
The Gravel Garden thegravelgarden.co.za