

## **Working in harmony with nature makes for a successful food garden**

In its support of community food gardens, Shoprite ensures that the beneficiaries are taught modern farming methods to incorporate the proper utilisation of existing resources. This particular aspect made a profound impact on the Eldorado Park Food Garden in Gauteng.

“It’s such a blessing to be taught these new ways to grow vegetables and to make our garden more productive,” says George Dickson (66) who established the food garden in 2003.

“All we knew then was the common method of farming, which is to put the seeds in the soil, water the soil and then wait for the crops to grow, but now we know about companion planting and mulching, which helps the plants to grow faster,” explains George.

On a 2.5-hectare plot, which belongs to the Missouri Secondary School, George and two volunteers established the garden to feed poor people in Eldorado Park.

“I used to be a counselor and I also worked for the municipality, so I’ve always been involved in community work. When we started the garden in 2003, it was because we realised there were many people in the community who didn’t have food in their homes. Initially, we wanted to start a skills development programme, but there was more of a need for a food garden,” says George.

The Eldorado Park Food Garden contributes vegetables to the school’s feeding scheme, they donate to poor community members and they sell some produce in the community. The crops include spinach, cabbage, beetroot, carrots and tomatoes.

This food garden is one of the 87 gardens across South Africa that Shoprite has partnered with in its bid to ensure food security in the communities it serves. It is through partnerships like these, that Shoprite has helped to provide meals to over 400 000 people in the last year.

The retailer invested in the Eldorado Park Food Garden by providing gardening equipment, seedlings, ongoing training and water infrastructure, which includes a water tank and gutters around the school for rainwater harvesting.

“Now that we have a good crop of vegetables, we want to expand the garden and sell the vegetables to shops in the area. We also want to restart our skills development programme to teach young people about these new gardening methods,” says George.

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CAPTION: George Dickson (left) and his fellow gardeners have partnered with Shoprite to feed residents of Eldorado Park.