

Avid gardener turns her passion into a business

When Paulina Ntontela from Goshen Village, near Cathcart in the Eastern Cape, was forced to leave her job to look after her children, she knew she was making the right decision - even though she was losing a monthly income.

Her husband, a reservist who works occasionally, would look after their two sons, while Paulina (47) attended gardening workshops offered by Shoprite at the local primary school.

"I love working in the garden. I'm connected to the soil and I'm always happy to be in the garden," says Paulina, whose gardening acumen saw her start a nursery earlier this year which has since blossomed into a flourishing small business.

Shoprite supplied a shade cloth structure, nursery start-up kit, plant material, and seedlings through its implementation partner Food & Trees for Africa. The retailer's support will also see Paulina being mentored by commercial nurseries in the area.

Paulina grows parsley, wild garlic, mint, thyme, basil, green peppers, oregano, pennyroyal, sour figs, fennel, rocket, lavender, rosemary, cabbage, lettuce and spinach, which she sells in Cathcart. She shares her surplus vegetables with neighbours and supplies seedlings and plants to other community food gardens in and around Goshen Village.

"I used to garden before, but my garden wasn't very good and the crops didn't do well. With Shoprite's help, I now know about permaculture and how to grow crops throughout the year. I also saved for a water tank, so I don't have to walk 5km with the wheelbarrow to get water for my garden," she says.

Paulina chose to focus on growing herbs because there are no nurseries in Cathcart growing herbs and there is limited supply in Queenstown. "People want herbs, but they can't get them here, and that's why I grow herbs and I'm always adding more to my garden," explains Paulina.

She continues to attend the Shoprite gardening workshops at the school because she is constantly looking for new ideas to implement.

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CAPTION: Paulina Ntontela in her garden, which not only provides fresh herbs and veggies for her and her neighbours, but also serves as a nursery supplying seedlings to food gardens in the area around Goshen Village.