

Flourishing *network*

Brothers Niall and Grant McNulty have shaken up SA's gardening scene with an award-winning blog where you can wheel and deal plants and seeds in cyberspace

Many gardeners are passionate about swapping seeds and cuttings and brothers Niall (right) and Grant (left) McNulty are no exception. This pair of award-winning bloggers have taken this concept further, giving it a 21st-century, social-media twist.

Created three years ago, the McNultys' blog, *Sprig mulch love*, offers a fresh take on gardening and its context in the green world and also lets their online community swap knowledge and dreams beyond their often confined starter plots.

The birth of the blog was the simple result of first-time gardener Niall, who's based in Durban, wanting to share his new hobby with his friends and family.

"It was a great learning experience – the beautiful flowers from seemingly random plants, the birdlife and insects coming back to the area and the thrill of recreating an ecosystem," he enthuses.

"Niall had a thriving jungle when I returned after a couple of years in London," recalls Grant. He remembers being keen to get his hands dirty too – and added his own experiences to Niall's on the blog.

Meanwhile, Niall graduated from Durban Botanic Gardens' highly-rated permaculture course. "Using these principles, you can plant and grow your own veggies and end up with much healthier, tastier food that doesn't need much water or attention," he grins.

Both brothers use digital skills in their careers – Niall in managing indigenous

knowledge and local history projects and Grant as a researcher in archives and communications – so applying them to their favourite personal activities, gardening and green issues, was just second nature.

Discovering a group of people growing their own food and discussing it online, prompted Niall and Grant to open their blog from comments-only to hosting community-style posts from a wide range of members. The buzz this created led to their Best Green Blog Award at the 2010 SA Blog Awards.

In the past year, the latest inspired addition has been an online plant-and-seed exchange. "We'd often shared plant material with friends," says Niall. "What's different now is we're sharing seeds, bulbs and cuttings – usually succulents or something that will last in the post for a couple of days – with the broader digital community. Essentially, it's the blog that facilitates the exchange, providing the link between people, who then work out the details of the transaction between themselves."

Popular at the moment among cyber swappers is turmeric. But two of the greatest hits ever have been spekboom, for its soil-binding properties, and comfrey. "Nobody can find comfrey in Cape Town," says Grant who now lives in the Mother City and often blogs on eco issues in the Cape and elsewhere, as well as on his pet hate, the alien syringa.

Ploughing ever onward, Facebook and Twitter links have joined the seed-and-plant exchange on the site. A plant database link will be added soon, the next step in expanding the site is to include curated links to content the brothers enjoy and hope their followers will, too. Organic growth in cyberspace, you might say... **GH**

SOURCE

Sprig mulch love www.sprig.co.za