

ENTREPRENEUR: **CLAIRE REID**

# Coming up roses

Newspaper and flour seed strips germinate into award-winning product

"**GROWING VEGETABLES** yourself is the optimum solution if you're trying to live on a minimum wage," says Claire Reid, a 24-year-old budding entrepreneur who's planting a seed that – if nourished well over time – could blossom into a flower of inspiration to many innovative thinkers in a country desperately in need of venture creation.

Reid is the brains behind Reel Gardening – a simple, cost-effective and convenient gardening concept she invented as a Grade 10 pupil in 2002 and for which she's become the centre of attention over the past eight years, receiving nominations and scooping numerous local and international awards for her project.

Since February, Reid has been working up to 16 hours a day trying to cope with the demand for her Reel Gardening strips after the product formally hit the market, thanks to an R800 000 loan to kick-start the concept from small business incubators Anglo American Zimele.

"Our online orders are skyrocketing. We're getting about 50 online orders a day. At times, stock gets sold out in a day," says Reid – who's also taking a Masters in architecture at the University of Pretoria.

Reel Gardening is a pre-fertilised seed strip that encases seeds in biodegradable paper. The strip is planted vertically and indicates the correct depth it must be buried below the soil by a colour-coded sign. Currently, reel produces 10 different types of veggies, 10 types of herbs and three types of flowers.

The venture started off as a father and

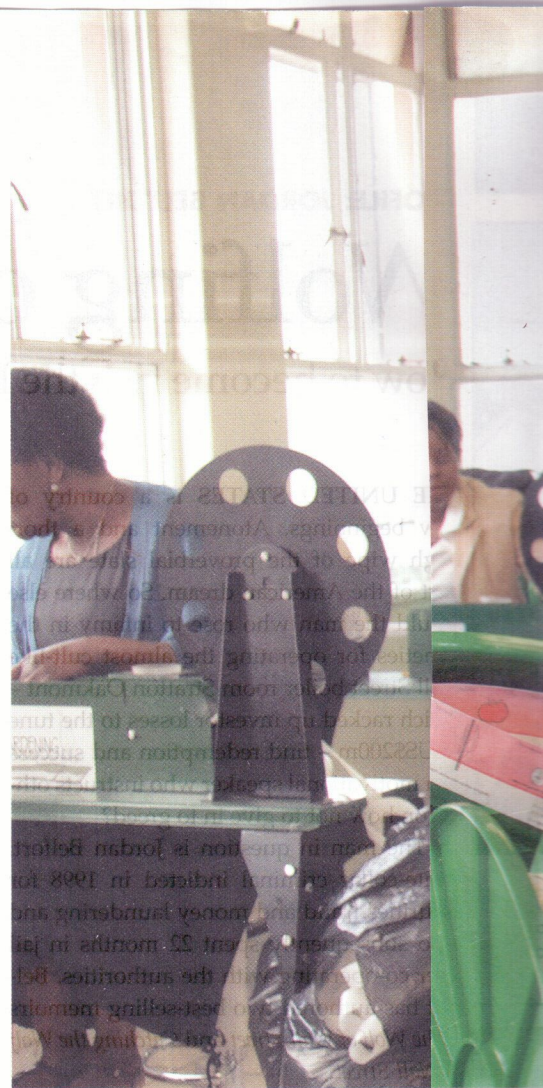
daughter initiative to try and save money on basic vegetables by developing a home garden. "My dad was very entrepreneurial. From a very young age he encouraged us to focus on the value of money. He told us money made is far more valuable than money given to you. So from an early age I was making Christmas cards and selling them to people on the street," says Reid.

Her dad told her if she started a vegetable garden he'd buy from her instead of the local outlet. That was music to the ears of the aspirant entrepreneur, even though she had scant ideas of how to start. "I literally had land – within reach of sunlight – the size of a door," she says. "I figured out I could plant five tomatoes, three beans and spinach."

But when she went to buy seed she realised home gardening wasn't made easy for anyone. Seeds were packaged in large quantities, costing more than a small garden would need, and instructions not written so that the average person could understand. "I thought I needed to create a way that made gardening fun and easy for me: it must be 'doable' and cost effective. That became my framework."

After pondering for a while, she took strips of newspapers and stuck them together with baking flour, with liquid fertilizer and the seeds inside, and planted the strip. It made sense for her to use paper and flour because both decompose and wouldn't harm the seeds.

Coincidentally, she was also struggling with science at school – a subject she badly



## ICEBREAKERS

**What's the best book you've ever read?**

*The Little Prince*, by Antoine De Saint-Exupery, and *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coelho.

**What's your worst characteristic?**

I'm a perfectionist.

**The best piece of advice you've ever received?**

The world is conspiring in your favour.

**How do you relax?**

I raise guide dog puppies for the Guide Dog Association. I relax by taking them to the park every day at five.

**One piece of advice for would-be entrepreneurs?**

The word "No" just means you need to try harder and tackle it from another angle.

**What do you like most about your job?**

The people I come into contact with every day and the number of lives I reach in a positive way.

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