

Young South Africans you have to take to lunch...

Mail & Guardian



Claire Reid

CEO and Founder, Reel Gardening

Claire Reid sat in the bare soil where she was to plant her veggie patch, tape measure lying between her knees, and very frustrated. Her father had said if the 16-year-old grew her own vegetables he would happily purchase them from her rather than from the local supermarket. "I had to buy four kilograms of compost, five different kinds of fertiliser and a packet of 500 tomato seeds when I only needed three or four."

At this point Reid thought there had to be a design solution to such a problem, "mainly to help myself". And that is how Reel Gardening began. Reid invented biodegradable strips that encase seeds placed apart at the correct distance and with appropriate feed already inside. The glue used is water-soluble and all seeds and fertilisers are organic.

Reid intentionally designed the strip-producing machine to be manual in order to save energy. By enabling would-be gardeners to buy three or four metres of tomatoes Reid has made gardening cost-effective and simple for those who really need it.

Reel Gardening is often called on by non-profit organisations to set up food gardens in local communities and educate people in how to look after a garden.

Reid, who is completing her master's degree in architecture at the University of Pretoria, sees the symmetry between architecture and gardening as obvious. Involved in a project for cost-effective housing that will build two-bedroom, one-bathroom houses with running water and solar power within weeks, Reid has also supplied the "garden in a box", which can supply fresh produce to a family of six within 30 days.

Reel Gardening only opened its offices on February 12 this year but already employs eight working mothers.

"We aim to have 50 employees by the end of the year," Reid says. She is also training employees to take on larger tasks such as acquiring administration and computer skills. "My employees who want responsibility can have as much as they want to take on, and I will help them do so," she says. — **Lisa Steyn**

Lunch spot: Mantra, Parkhurst, Johannesburg