

## **My Passion; My Gardens**

Tanya Visser

Horticulturist

Editor, The Gardener and Die Tuinier

Presenter, The Gardener Television Series

Separating my experiences as a gardener from other areas in my life is just not that simple. They are inter-related. My life, my successes and my happiness comes from doing what I love; gardening.

It all goes back to my first memory of picking up a spade at my dad's feet, inviting me to explore the garden. Once I touched the handle, my adventurous spirit took over and gardening became a part of me. I am not sure what damage I had done to my dad's garden before he saw potential, but he quickly introduced me to the excitement of growing vegetables. Perhaps he thought I could do less damage to a carrot than to his prized orchids, but one thing is sure, they were the sweetest-tasting vegetables ever and to this day, I love home-grown veggies.

My passion for gardening led me to a rather torturous, but enjoyable time at the then Natal Technikon, and ultimately to one of the proudest moments of my life; the day I qualified as a horticulturist. Gardening fills my day, every day. It is my life and what an exhilarating experience it is to share this with everyone.

Undoubtedly, the first step to success lies in that passion to do what you love. And, having a formal qualification to do this, how much better can it get?

I have been fortunate to be recognised, not only for the work I do; but for the work I love. Some highlights of my life include:

- passing my plant identification examinations, something horticulturists dread, but ultimately love the absolute satisfaction of looking at a plant and knowing what it is,
- being accepted as a student horticulturist at Dunrobin Garden Centre and thrilled at being asked to stay on full time after completing a year of practical training,
- being entrusted at the helm of Dunrobin, improving its customer offering and being a catalyst in growing awareness of the centre throughout KZN, and it becoming synonymous with unrivaled quality and uncompromising service levels,
- being a part of a committed garden centre team, ensuring their personal development within the environment and seeing them flourish under my guidance,
- believing in the opportunities The Gardener Magazine presented when it was breaking into the tough media-world, and then the courage to leave a secure job to realise these opportunities,
- finding time to appear on radio gardening shows,
- tackling the challenges and impossible time schedules of editing a magazine and filming The Gardener television series, even though my staff screamed "NO! It'll kill you!"
- leading a group of keen South African gardeners to the renowned Chelsea Flower Show and gardens of England and Scotland, frantically trying to stay ahead of schedule so they could see as many gardens as possible and getting them all back home, tired, but safe and, just a touch late,
- being at ease to accept that it is okay for my manic need to have my lawn weed-free and neatly edged and accepting that not everyone shares, or needs to share, this obsession,
- having endless patience to grow and nurture a special collection of potted succulents,
- designing and planting 2 of my own gardens from scratch and coaxing them to maturity,
- doing countless garden makeovers and water feature installations, some for the magazine, some for television and some because the owners needed a glorious garden and I could just not help myself,
- having a special group of people working for me who have the confidence to say, without any hesitation, when confronted with an impossible garden-related query, "I'll ask Tanya, she'll know!"
- completing a Childline Counsellors Course and conscientiously doing weekly phone duties; not directly related to gardening, but my need to make sure plants have the right conditions to grow well, even after a setback, must have played a role in my commitment to help children get the right conditions to move on from a trauma.

My passion for gardening is a part of my personality. Not a day goes by without me appreciating the joy of nature and the role it plays in setting the stage for me to play out my dreams.