



Story Sharing



Finding the Gold in Composting

“Xaba ye golide” – “*Let us find gold*” is a youth group dedicated to finding the wisdom (gold) in their Xhosa heritage and learning from this to care for the local environment. Most people in the area no longer grew their own vegetables and their parents had told them that every Xhosa homestead had vegetable gardens in the old days.

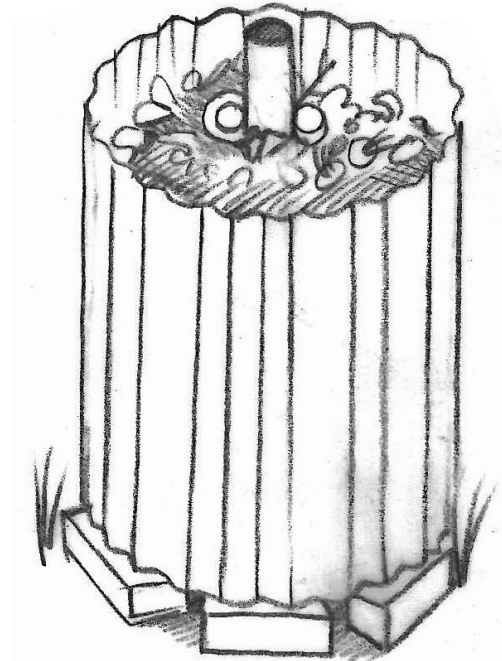


In their research they found out that most people in urban areas had stopped making compost and collecting cattle dung for vegetable gardens. The decline in gardening had developed after the bubonic plague of the early 20th Century. In Port Elizabeth and across the country local municipalities had had banned household waste dumps. Many of these were traditional compost dumps (*Uthutu* -Xhosa; *Izala* - Zulu) but the municipal officials saw these as sites where rats were breeding.

At the time people living near the docks in Port Elizabeth were moved to what became Red Location, the old British Army concentration camp where Boer families were held as prisoners of war during the Anglo-Boer war.

In what was to become an apartheid township the health authorities correctly prevented dumping to improve health but this had the effect of reducing local compost production for home vegetable gardening.

The youth group wanted to restore the '**gold**' by teaching people to make compost without the health problem of rubbish and rats. To do this they collected old corrugated ironsheets and used these to make composting drums. By not using pits the composting happened in aerobic conditions (with oxygen) so that there was no anaerobic decomposition (rotting without oxygen) that would breed diseases.



The design of the compost bin had been developed by a researcher at Cedara Agricultural College and it consisted of the corrugated iron drum raised on three bricks with a stick down the middle to help the oxygen flow into and up through the composting leaves and vegetable waste.

Xaba ye golide started a partnership with some of the old people who still had gardens. They worked to support people to build their own composters and vegetable gardens in the area. People were surprised that there was so much Xhosa practical wisdom in compost gardening and felt proud of their small vegetable gardens in their yards.

