Jewels of the Garden Route – Sizamele Indigenous Nursery

Nestled under scrub-forest canopy at the foot of a large vegetated dune Sizamele Indigenous Nursery gently unfolds in a ribbon along the boundary of Smutsville, Sedgefield. Today the drought-parched Garden Route is blessed with gentle penetrating rain - mist swirls amongst the trees and along the narrow neatly raked passages under the canopy. Every so often a splash of sunlight brightens a forest clearing bursting with flourishing young plants. Sizamele has a uniquely creative layout. Pathways bordered with rows of bagged saplings meander through the forest inviting exploring while rousing a persistent sense of being in a magical fairy garden – a Jewel!

Sizamele means “make an effort” in Xhosa, an apt description of Willy Pedro’s “can do” attitude to life. Born and bred in the region his story is immutably tied to the forestry industry where his father made a living. Growing up in a humble 3-roomed forester’s cottage that accommodated an extended family, life was never easy. After suffering several life-shattering experiences beyond the family’s control, Willy, at a tender age with very little education found himself in dire straits with a younger sibling in his care. Forced to earn a living to keep from starving, Willy took on any kind of work. He sold fish, was a farm labourer, construction worker, domestic worker, gardener and even cook. In this unforgiving hands-on school he learnt about life and work the hard way. He amassed an enormous amount of practical skills and knowledge until almost inevitably he also joined the Department of Forestry. In his inimitable way he learnt and soaked up information about the forests. He was intrigued by how the forest regenerates itself with not even the tiniest detail omitted. In this purposeful manner Willy acquired an uncanny insight into how nature works and indigenous trees became his passion. When the Department of Forestry turned over the Southern Cape plantations and Forests to private enterprise, numerous forest workers were retrenched. Willy didn’t despair and established the Sizamele Indigenous Nursery in 1995 on a green belt zone rented from the Municipality. At last he could realise his dream.

Applying the knowledge gleaned about the growth habits of the indigenous trees in their natural forest surroundings Willy mimics the forest processes and grows all his indigenous trees from seed, accommodating birds, buck and other small creatures as inherent to the process. No commercial fertilisers, insecticides or herbicides are used. Only leaf-mould and grass-cuttings are used for making compost. The nursery uses recycled sewerage water. Some of the species being grown are: *Podocarpus falcatus* (Yellowwood), *Ocotea bullata* (Stinkwood), *Erythrina lysistemon* (Coral Tree), *Calodendron capense* (Cape chestnut), *Olea capensis* (Ironwood), *Ekebergia capensis* (Cape Ash), *Doyvalis caffra* (kei apple). Willy’s liaison with the Department of Forestry is ongoing, nevertheless economic circumstances have necessitated diversification and some popular garden subjects as well as a selection of fresh vegetables (at Waterwood – see below) are also being grown.
Willy’s daughter Wilberine looks after Waterwood Nursery an outlet in Sedgefield. Sons Dehen and William make up the rest of the team. Willy and his team welcome members and their friends to visit Sizamele and Waterwood. Willy’s contact details are: 082 090 2147 or 082 678 8443.

Photo: Ena McIntyre