

Just keep growing says Renshia Manual of GrowBox

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Situated on the Cape Flats in Cape Town, wholesale nursery GrowtBox manufactures portable grow boxes made from recycled pallets for people living in disadvantaged areas to grow vegetables sustainably. By increasing food security within disadvantaged households, these vegetable boxes make it possible for individuals to grow vegetables themselves in small or limited spaces around their homes.



Renshia Manual

The beneficiaries of the boxes receive training on sustainable growing methods and once training is completed, they receive a fully stocked with vegetable seedling grow boxes.

Entrepreneur and owner of [GrowBox](#), Renshia Manual has obtained many accolades to her name, from being named a winner of the #YouthStartCT in 2016 to being selected for RedBull Amapiko in 2017 – her business has been created to empower, develop skills and create employment for the unemployed mothers of Hanover Park in Cape Town.

Here she shares more with us about her journey and what it means to be a woman continuously growing and striving to help communities in need...

What does a day in your life look like?

With four children around, no two days are ever the same.

My day usually starts at 5am with Pastor TD Jakes in the background while I water the seedlings in the nursery in my backyard, then it's getting my kids and myself ready for the day.

We all leave at 7.30am to our various destinations – they school and me to the new nursery not far from home. Depending on whether or not I have off-site meetings scheduled I usually spend the morning at the nursery and try to be home when the children get home from school.

Living in Hanover Park has had me to alter my routine in order to be home when the children get home from school due to the unpredictable up flair of shootings and gang violence in the area from time to time. If I have to work late then they will come to the nursery straight from school.

My later afternoons are spent assisting with homework or assignments and reading sessions with my youngest two.

■ ***What made you choose a career in agriculture, and what was the inspiration behind GrowthBox – how did it come into existence?***

I know that it might sound like a cliché, but I did not choose agriculture – it chose me.

My father's family is from Robertson and my mother's family is from Goedverwagcht near Malmesburg. Both towns are surrounded by vast farmlands and both families were active subsistence farmers growing for their households.

Having grown up in an urban suburb most of that gardening knowledge had almost vanished, but I always had a hindering to keep growing. I helped my dad and mom in the garden while growing up and when I had children, I always kept the garden in check but that was not enough – the agricultural calling was always there.

In 2015 whilst being unemployed and struggling to feed my children, I transformed a dead, vacant space in my backyard into a vegetable garden that had us eating from it for months. My kids were so excited, because before dinner I would let them decide what we would eat and it was their duty to harvest our dinner from the garden.

In 2016 I saw an ad in the local paper that invited unemployed youth to submit sustainable business ideas that would employ their communities while reacting to employment. It was then that I entered the competition with an idea of opening a wholesale nursery within Hanover Park.

It was during the workshops that they kept emphasising that we should find our niche' – find what sets us apart from our competitors. I kept thinking what would set me apart from other wholesale nurseries, but also be beneficial to communities like to one that I come from. How can a wholesale nursery be beneficial to low-income households that need to grow their own food, but who is incapable of doing so because of limited land spaces – and that is when GrowBox was born.

■ ***Do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women?***

Most definitely. Women are the unsung heroes of our everyday society. During August, we honour the women that has come before us, their accomplishments and their struggles; but we should also honour the modern-day women – they work themselves to the bone without any compensation or recognition. They tend to the wounds, mend the clothes, cook the meals, clean the home help with the homework and prepare for the next day all before they see to themselves. They leave their homes ready to conquer, and although they are constantly faced with adversity and hardships; they dig deep and strive to overcome their obstacles.

Women are resilient and strong and during this month we need to empower one another and acknowledge one another's achievements.

■ ***What are some of the barriers that you have faced as a women?***

I have had numerous barriers. The one being the perception that what I do is a hobby and it was not really taken seriously by men. I was told to stop wasting my time and to find a job – any job but to stop wasting my time with growing meaningless things. I was told that low income households would not waste their time growing food and that I was wasting my time taking the entrepreneurship route. That an urban girl knows nothing about agriculture.

The great thing about agriculture that I have come to learn is that there is no one fix solution to it - what works for one might not work for another. There is so many variable factors (like soil type, water, PH, alkaline and nutrition, etc.) that needs to be factored into the whole process, and we had all had to learn to adapt with the change in climate and conditions.

I enjoy it when I am told that what I am doing is meaningless and then proving them wrong.

Times are changing and so should people's perception about women in agriculture.

■ ***Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in your field?***

Just go with your gut. Don't let anyone tell you that it cannot be done. If you are dreaming about it why shy away from it. Go out there and make your dreams a reality.

■ ***Who is your biggest influence?***

Jacky (Jacqueline) Goliath from Defynne Nursery – she is such an inspiration. She and her co-founder started De Fyne in a backyard but has since won numerous agricultural and business awards. The De Fynne nursery supplies major retailers such as Woolworths, Massmart, Stodells, and Spar in South Africa as well as landscapers, commercial farmers and wine estates.

■ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

We should stand together and empower one another, learn from one another and support one another.

■ ***Any words of wisdom you would like to share with women in business?***

It might seem hard but trust me, it's all worth it. Do not let anyone, ever, put you down because of an obstacle that you think

you could not have overcome. The solution might not be clear at first but sooner or later it will be.

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ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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