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\$6.95

Fall 2013 • No. 19

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Display until November 30, 2013
zone4magazine.com

Scents of Balance



Kate gardens organically, employing neem oil, soap sprays, cayenne/garlic sprays, and beneficial nematodes to rid her plants of pests.



Kate Rossetto of Billings, Montana, grows the ingredients she uses in her various skin products.

It really is amazing what one woman can do. Ingredients like curiosity, the wisdom of experience, and sheer determination come together in Kate Rossetto of Billings, Montana. The result is Scents of Balance, a diversified garden-based business founded firmly in a deep sense of reverence for the plant kingdom and its potential to help, heal, and harmonize humankind.

Kate officially began her business in 1988 while living in Maui, Hawaii. However, it was over 20 years earlier that she started investigating the methods and rewards of making lotions and creams for herself and for family members in her hometown of Billings. From the very beginning, herbs from her the backyard garden were both her inspiration and essential ingredients in her creations. This has been a template from which she has drawn her entire career.

Today, Kate has a 1-1/3 acre organic gardening operation adjoining her home. While small, it is abundant, supplying her with the herbs for her handmade beauty and culinary products, vegetables for her CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and to sell to local grocers and restaurants, and the experiential foundation for her work managing a nearby community garden in collaboration with the Billings Housing Authority. On top of that, she makes ends meet by cleaning houses two days each week. Except for a very part-time garden assistant, Kate runs the entire operation herself.

While it is a great deal of work and effort, Kate says that her passion for working with plants is at the heart of why she loves what she does. “It’s an alchemical process for me. It’s getting to know plants, learning what they’re about, what their message is, how they are to be used—whether they are applicable to an herbal toner for your skin or if they might work in a salad dressing, too! It is really making friends with plants—that’s what I love about what I do. And after a while, you find that you know what to do with all of it.”

Kate carries that passion for relationship into her business philosophy. “Scents of Balance is about developing a friendship

between the user and the plant,” she says. Kate explains that she believes there is an “energetic relationship that develops between the user and the product.” She believes that that is what Scents of Balance is all about.

Kate says it all started when, “I really wanted to make stuff out of what I grew.” As a lover of cooking and food, she always wanted fresh herbs on hand. With time, she says she, “started realizing that some of those herbs are wonderful for your hair and for your skin.”

Nevertheless, making beauty products was only an avocation for many years. As a young wife and mother of three, Kate worked alongside her husband in their demanding but rewarding restaurant business. In 1976, after a divorce, she opened her own restaurant, a gourmet dinner establishment in Huntley (east of Billings), The Red Dog Saloon, which she operated until 1982. Kate always drew from her own garden in those ventures, melding her love of cooking with her love of gardening.

By 1985, Kate had remarried and life was good. But her whole world changed very suddenly in that year’s cold month of January, when her 16-year-old daughter Laura committed suicide. Desperately needing to heal, Kate was drawn to Hawaii as a place where she could grapple with the pain, sorrow and confusion of this tragic loss. In November 1985, she and her husband set off for this new chapter in their lives.

During her years in Maui, Kate became more interested in aromatherapy, leading to further exploration and study of plant use for healing and well-being. Eventually, she began teaching workshops and classes there, which propelled her to the formal creation of her business Scents of Balance.

For Kate, creating her business was about much more than profit. “It’s never been about money,” she said, “it’s about following a vision for what you want to do. And that vision was anchored in her garden. “There was always the garden. It has always been integral

to the product line. It was the first part of the business.”

While Hawaii continued to supply Kate with both a year-round garden and a rich, healing environment, in the late 1990s she felt the call to return to Montana, as her mother was aging and needed her assistance. It was like starting over, but she felt strongly that, “It was time; it was time to come back home.”

Upon their return in 1996, Kate and her husband purchased their home and began the long, hard work of amending the heavy clay and alkaline soil so characteristic of Montana. Kate began layering with “loads and loads of manure, grass clippings, leaves—whatever I could get my hands on and that was cheap.”

Mulching also helps reduce watering needs. Kate relies on an irrigation ditch from which she pumps her water. Due to silt content, she is forced to use an overhead watering system, though she is currently exploring irrigation systems that might work with the ditch water.

Kate has a 6-foot-tall cedar fence, an eager German shepherd, and a cat that collaborate to prevent problems with wildlife pests. She says that as an organic gardener she employs natural methods such as neem oil, soap sprays, cayenne/garlic sprays (homemade!), and beneficial nematodes to tackle other pest issues she encounters.

When asked what she most enjoys growing in her garden, Kate says she loves all of the plants and would have a hard time designating a favorite. When pushed, though, she admits to having a special fondness for growing herbs. “It all began with herbs—there’s just so much you can do with them! Culinary and medicinal herbs have always been my first love.”

In 2009 Kate’s yields reached the point that she was able to begin selling to local natural grocers and restaurants. In 2011, she began a small CSA operation as well. It has proved very popular, more than doubling in size over the first two years of its existence—from five initial subscribers to 11. The 2013 season will see the addition of another five subscribers. Kate calls the food-centered part of her business “Kate’s Garden.”

Kate’s decades of gardening experience have enabled her to take her skills even further into the service of the community by working with the Billings Housing Authority to manage a nearby community garden pilot project. She works with Vista volunteers to design the gardens, teach people how to garden, and what they can do with the resulting produce.

Currently, Scents of Balance offers a wide variety of products, ranging from aromatherapy mists and flower essences to natural skin care products (lotions, powders, mists, soaps, body butters, face creams, hand and foot products, therapeutic skin products, bath soaks and scrubs, baby products, and massage oils) to a line of gourmet seasonings and fruit and herb vinegars.

Running a small, diversified business is not easy, but Kate believes that small business, “is the answer,” and key to a thriving, vibrant community. “Building community is about learning what the needs are and where you can serve those needs; I would really like my business to be a community business,” she said.

To find out more about Kate, the Scents of Balance product line, her CSA, and the classes and workshops she offers, go to www.ScentsOfBalance.com, call 406-254-9182 or find the business on Facebook.

—Kristen Prinzing

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