

Putting the tea in tasty



Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

At more than one local farmers' market, you will find Joey Lemieux with his display of very fine teas, artfully displayed in beautiful boxes, a wide array, which he planted, grew or harvested, dried and packaged himself.

Joey is the perfect picture of what he does. Sincerely mild mannered, his long hair bound atop his head, he speaks with quiet enthusiasm about the teas, little cups and warm brew ready for sampling.

"I pretty well sell all the tea I make," was one of his remarkable statements during a telephone interview later in the week. "When I began to be interested in teas, I soon realized that they would take up all my time. So, now I'm doing this full time."

This revelation came to him while he and his partner, Ellen Brakel, artist and massage therapist, were managing their health food store in Shelburne, which they called Soaring Heart.

Said he, "I had taken a permaculture course at the Hockley Valley Ecology Retreat Centre. Running the store made me more aware of natural choices in food. I wanted to start my own product and I started growing my own herbs for all the tea. I have to order in chaga, ginger, lemon, turmeric but these are just a small percentage of what I do. I have just finished installing a green house.

"I'm planting herbs right into the ground in the greenhouse. It just extends the growing season in the spring and in the fall. I'm also working on building a solar dehydrator. It was a solar firewood kiln that a friend of mine had and he gave it to me. I had to dismantle it there, move it to here and adapt it. I'm going to put in a solar panel running 12 volts to run fans."

In spite of a relatively short growing season, tea is a year-round business, for the autumn is the season of harvesting the last of the wild herbs and the winter sees Joey blending and making his teas. "Winter is a matter of drying enough tea to go through the year. I do the dehydration all through the winter. So, this is an all-year-round occupation."

"The dehydrator is like a box that you put the herbs in and you control the heat? herbs are dehydrated at very low temperature to retain all their [good] properties," he explained. Then I can blend some with chaga or chai but, mostly, the teas are just one herb."

He has considered everything. ?The tea bags are whitened with hydrogen peroxide, rather than bleach as are most commercial tea bags. The bags are made of Manila hemp and they're actually biodegradable.?

Not all his tea is strictly grown in a garden: ?I also do a lot of wild harvesting,? he told us. Dandelion, St. John's Wort, wild red raspberry leaf. We have a farm of ten acres. I use the whole property including the regular garden.?

In fact, from his Dufferin farm, Joey grows in an organic method (no certificate yet) or harvests in a sustainable way and creates 40 different teas. In addition, he outsources ingredients for another eleven teas, plus two that are seasonal.

?I'm happy to be making these teas, because I wanted to create my own farm product. Tea seemed the way to do it myself, making it more streamlined and better,? he commented, ?One way and another, it is selling all over the world. People come and buy and take it with when they travel to visit friends and family.?

It could never be said that Joey's childhood was the foundation of his interest in the world of sustainability and natural products. He relayed some of his childhood history, as remarkable as the rest.

?I lived in a caravan, travelling around the oil sites, in Texas with my mother until I was 10. She's Canadian but my father is American. My mother repaired seismic cables. They were working for a big oil company Everyone lives in a caravan. When my parents broke up, my mother and I lived together in a caravan. The whole crew would get and move together to the next site. We lived just 50 miles north of the Mexican

Joey and his mother returned to Canada when he was 10 and moved to Collingwood. At the age of 19, he went out west for a while.

?It was there that I got more into the holistic lifestyle. After a few years, it was time to come back.?

On his website, these teas can be ordered with the whole list shown as options for purchase.

The website is www.escarpmentgardens.ca