



The Beauty *of* Nature

Inspired by the nature around her, based in High Spen, Eileen Hoey handmakes cosmetic products using only homegrown, organic and locally-sourced ingredients. We caught up with her to find out more about Handmade by Nature, and how what started as a kitchen table operation is now moving into its biggest premises yet

What is Handmade by Nature?

I started making soaps as a hobby, then when I had kids I began using them on their skin because I was concerned about the ingredients that are in some baby products. By the time I had my second child, I wondered whether other folk might be interested in some of my products. In that same year I decided to launch Handmade by Nature and that's really how it came to be.

Can you tell us about the brand?

The brand is very closely linked to my core beliefs as a person. I make sure that the materials I use are recycled such as recycling coffee grounds in my soaps, reusing candle tins and makeup containers, as well as essential oil bottles getting reused and turned into reed diffusers. So it's very much a low-impact, locally-based, environmentally-friendly business which tries to concentrate on palm oil- and plastic-free skincare products that are good for you. I also believe in growing my own ingredients so I use lots of things from my allotment that are good for your skin, as well as trying to work with other local businesses that have a similar kind of ethos in terms of taking care of the environment and sourcing things that are local to us. For instance, the beeswax and honey that I use in my products is from a local beekeeper who really believes in making sure that the bee colonies are as healthy as possible.

Tell us bit about your products.

All my products are palm oil-, plastic- and cruelty-free, as well as being free from any sort of additives you might find in more commonplace off-the-shelf products like SLS, parabens and foaming agents which can be potentially harmful. Instead I use as many natural ingredients as possible. My products are heavily reliant on a type of olive oil that is a by-product of olive oil production as I've always looked for ways of reusing materials rather than causing too much damage to the environment. However, I'm actually going to be launching a soap that's made with rapeseed from a local farm in Northumberland, so I'm trying to make my base oils even more local than they already are.

My products include natural soaps made in the traditional cold process way, shampoos and conditioners in solid bars rather than plastic bottles, cleansers for your skin, anti-ageing face cream made from local beeswax and candles and wax melts made with essential oils rather than synthetic fragrances.



How do you make soaps in the traditional way?

There are quite a few different ways to make soap, but cold process is a slow way without actually heating the soap in order to not lose any of the goodness. Although you melt the oils to a certain temperature so that they are liquid, you're not heating them so much that you lose any of the good things that you put in. It is quite lengthy as you need to wait at least four weeks before it's dried out enough to use, but to be honest the longer you leave it the better it is. I know a lot of soap makers on the continent make similar soaps and they might leave it cure for up to a year. The longer you leave it, the less water content it has, meaning it's a dryer, harder bar that lasts longer.

Tell us more about the ingredients you use.

All the flowers, herbs and other botanicals I use in my soaps are home grown, for example things like lavender, roses, heather, calendula, poppy seeds and rosemary. Before drying them I'll either infuse them with oils to use in the soap making process or I'll add them to the soap once it's made, for example lavender petals within the soap, or I'll just use them for decoration.

There's a community garden in my village of High Spen and I gather hops from them because they're completely organic, and I use their rosemary. For every bar I sell using their products I donate 10 percent back to the community garden because it's a great resource for the local village.

I use local honey, and I'm going to be working closely with a couple of other local businesses such as The Paddock Farm shop up in High Spen. They have a smallholding which they use to supplement their vegetable box scheme and they're going to be growing some flowers for me this year too. So it's just trying to establish links with other like-minded people whilst collecting the right ingredients as well.

Why is sustainability important to you?

I think once you have kids it puts things a bit more into perspective, and that was a major contributing factor in the development of the business. It's always been something that's been important to me, but I'm in my late 30s now and it's something I wanted to pass on to my children. It's also really important to get my kids involved in growing the materials that I use in my products. They're very much involved in the allotment and garden side of things, helping to plant and grow the things that we use. It's important for them to know where stuff comes from.

Also the medicinal side of plants is something that a lot of us forget and there's so much to learn in terms of that. I wouldn't even claim to know the tip of the iceberg of all the health benefits of plants but I think it's an area that has so much that we can all learn from, and if we could pass some of that on to our kids, all the better.

What's next for Handmade by Nature?

I've been really fortunate in that the local village has been behind me from the beginning. It started off as kind of a

kitchen table operation whilst I was on maternity leave, but very quickly, as a result of local support, I was able to take on a workshop space above the farmshop in the village. Now, just a couple of years later, I'll be launching from a much bigger space in that building. The previous unit I had was much more of just a space for me to work that people could drop into if they were passing by, whereas this bigger space will have a kitchen area for me to make the products and pack them, an area for me to deliver workshops from and a small shop space.

I do feel like I've been able to progress a lot because of help from the village, and my aim is to have a bigger space for people to be able to come together, learn what it is that Handmade by Nature believes in, and have a go at making their own products. I wouldn't say I'm particularly profit driven, it's more of a fun thing to do which has been really well received and to be based in my own village, doing what I love, is great.

Buy online at handmadebynature.co.uk, or visit the new Handmade by Nature shop at 7-9 Ramsay Street, High Spen, Rowlands Gill NE39 2EL