

For the Love of Lavender



Photo courtesy of Mary Averill of Averill & Associates Creative Lab and Daybreak Lavender Farm.

Streetsboro couple cultivates sweet-smelling concoctions.

by Doris Larson

Jody Byrne was searching for acreage for a small alternative farm in 1994 when a realtor showed her a property on Frost Road in Streetsboro. She fell in love with the 14 acres and purchased it without even stepping inside the house. "Houses you can fix; land you can't fix," says Byrne, who found not only her farm but also the quiet rural setting she wanted.

Byrne was a city girl, but a job transfer brought her to Northeast Ohio from New York City. She works as a newsletter editor and trend forecaster for the professional spa, salon and cosmetic industries. But it's Daybreak Lavender Farm, which Byrne co-founded with husband Michael Slyker, that allows her to work at something she loves dearly. "Daybreak is my passion," she says.

People often ask Byrne why she chose to grow lavender. She has a long history with the plant. When she lived on a sixth floor overlooking the

East River in Manhattan, Byrne grew lavender on her balcony. Once settled in Ohio, she edged her rose beds with lavender.



Warnings that lavender doesn't grow easily in Ohio's wet winters did not deter Byrne and Slyker. After careful research, including having the soil analyzed by a certified organic test agency, they set out a test bed in 2002. Today, they have more than 13 varieties of lavender and 1,500 lavender plants. In 2004, the couple was delighted to learn that the Ohio Senate honored Daybreak Lavender Farm with a proclamation declaring it the first lavender farm in Ohio.

(continued)



The couple embraces the Native American “Seventh Generation” philosophy of farming and gardening that improves the land. Byrne and Slyker organically cultivate, grow, prune, harvest, dry and propagate their lavender by hand. From their harvest, this entrepreneurial couple makes the soap. Byrne designs the assorted soaps by selecting oils she infuses with comfrey leaves, chamomile flowers and calendula petals. Slyker, a master soap maker, produces the soaps like our ancestors did, one batch at a time. To make Tahitian garden soap, Slyker mixes seven different oils—coconut, soy, castor, olive, sweet almond oil, cocoa butter and shea butter. He cooks the mixture until it shows a trace and adds color, seeds and lye. After he adds his last ingredient, fragrance, he waits until the mixture thickens and pours it into molds.

The next day, Slyker cuts the soap into blocks and stores it on wooden racks for 60-90 days.

Among Daybreak Lavender Farm’s several hand-formed, sculptural soaps is a fresh-cut variety with a lavender aroma made from a classic 17th century formula. This soap features scalloped edges with a faint imprint design of leaves and flowers. The couple also makes an almond cream complexion bar surfaced with chopped almonds and a chunky bar that incorporates sandalwood powder and bark from India and sports a raised imprint of a single flower. Customers receive their soap bars—each packaged in a wrapper that lists ingredients—nestled with tissue and placed in traditional black and white toile-printed bags.

Daybreak Farm product fans often shop for items on the Web and at selected local retailers. In mid-June,



Photo courtesy of Mary Averill of Averill & Associates Creative Lab and DayBreak Lavender Farm.

Byrne opened a small and intimate boutique, The Back Parlour Parfumerie, located inside Sandy’s Notions, a beautiful brick century home at the corner of state Route 14 and Diagonal Road in Streetsboro. Byrne stocks this European-style shop with a wide selection of products, including 18 custom-blended fragrances in some of Daybreak’s most popular products: soap, shower gel cream, enflourage solid perfume and vodka splash.

When she purchased the 14 acres that became Daybreak Farm, Byrne says her goal was to eventually make a living from her plot of lavender. She enjoys working at home with her husband and creating new products. Four years after putting in the first plants, Byrne and Slyker have a thriving business with orders coming in from such distant locales as Ireland, Australia, France, Israel, Canada and Singapore, as well as from throughout the United States. “I hope to create a similar opportunity in other people’s lives,” Byrne says. The couple currently trains several employees to set up satellite soap-making production in their own homes. Byrne’s business model projects a number of such small businesses in the future, all under the umbrella of Daybreak Lavender Farm. ■

A Lavender Celebration

Daybreak Lavender Farm has scheduled its first Lavender Festival, July 7-9. This family-friendly event presents hands-on activities, which include making a renaissance lavender wand, lavender picking, soap-making demonstrations and discovering the quiet of the farm’s Memorial Nature Sanctuary. To no surprise, refreshments include lavender lemonade and lavender tea cakes.

For directions, visit www.daybreaklavenderfarm.com