By Cassandra Leveille, GreenLeaf Intern



Kash Iraggi-Wiggins, the owner of Balance Aromatherapy, conveys a sustained, intimate knowledge of her products — where they are sourced and what blends of oils and herbs constitute the final product.

Kash started making aromatherapy products twenty-seven years ago, when her daughter, Phoenix, was born. Balance Aromatherapy sprang from her concern about the potential harmful effects of using conventional skin-care products on her daughter's skin, as the cosmetics industry is not regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration.

"A lot of people are conscientious of what they put in their bodies, but not what they put on their bodies," Kash said.

She started developing her line of products shortly after her daughter's birth, though she did not sell them — she made them primarily for family and friends. A licensed massage therapist, Kash found her interest in the therapeutic uses of essential oils revitalized after she received her aromatherapy certification in 2004.

"It all came flooding back," she said. The long-time hobby became a business.

Balance Aromatherapy's products have been carried by GreenStar since 2008. The products also retail at the seasonal Ithaca Holiday Store on the Commons and at Ithacamade, on West State Street. She also makes massage oils for August Moon Spa, located in the nearby La Tourelle Resort.

"[GreenStar has] been a great venue for me," said Kash, who also serves on GreenStar's Council. Her products have remained popular with GreenStar customers, selling well above average figures for local products. Kash frequently hosts demos at GreenStar to teach customers about the benefits of aromatherapy, which uses essential oils, derived from plants, to enhance psychological and physical well-being.

GreenStar's West-End store currently carries Balance Aromatherapy's rosemary/peppermint blend salt scrub, citrus and rosemary/peppermint massage and body oil, and sugar scrubs in citrus and lavender/rosemary blends. More recently the store began selling Balance Aromatherapy's therapeutic essential oils, in five varieties: tea tree, rosemary, eucalyptus, lemon and peppermint.

Sustainability is a crucial part of Kash's operations, and one that contributes to a fresh, unique blend for each product. The beeswax she sources is local, and she harvests herbs herself, often from her own gardens. When making her products, she blends herbs and essential oils in a manner designed to ensure easy absorption by the skin.

Many of her products use a jojoba oil base for this reason. Jojoba does not evaporate on the skin's surface, so it is an excellent moisturizer.

Kash makes her products in small batches, uses minimal packaging, and is invested in keeping her operations local so they continue to sustain the community and she remains autonomous in her business.

"If it gets too big, you lose control," she said.

Kash insists both her products and her community will remain healthy if both are local. She makes sure she oversees or has a part in each aspect of production. To Kash, this attention and care is a no-brainer. Since she is a local resident, it makes sense to keep her products local.

DiAnna Snyder, GreenStar's Wellness Manager, said she is proud to carry Balance Aromatherapy's products because Kash sources clean, natural, top-quality ingredients and adheres to a local ethos.

"Her integrity has always been top-notch," Snyder said.

Another benefit of serving a local clientele is the ability to develop new products in a dialogue with your customers, something Kash takes full advantage of. Her friends sample trial products and she makes improvements based on their feedback. She has recently developed a new line of skincare products that will be on GreenStar's shelves soon. The Save Face line, which is cream-based, will be offered as an alternative to her oil-based skincare products, with the same aromatherapy benefits. The cream is made with a blend of aloe vera, beeswax and calendula. Kash is excited both to offer her new products at GreenStar and to continue their thriving relationship.