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Diana Kaye

Diana Kaye is the co-founder of USDA-certified organic personal care products, TerrEssentials. She, along with her spouse and co-founder James Hahn, are also outspoken activists and educators who have been working for more than seventeen years to protect the word "organic" from attack by those who seek to exploit the word's integrity and spirit.

What was your green turning point?

We both grew up in the '60s and '70s when "ecology" was everywhere. We were serious young design professionals and we both chose positions of employment in DC that allowed us do the natural thing – walking or riding our bikes everywhere, shopping at resale shops, and packing brown bag lunches (re-using our bags, of course!) for daily meals in the parks. Our major green turning point, however, occurred in 1988 when my frightening encounter with cancer and chemo left me physically ravaged and with my immune system out of control. This harrowing experience drove us to begin our intensive chemical research quest that would change our lives forever. That led us to discover that the household and personal care products that we had assumed were safe were anything but.

What has been your biggest lifestyle change?

City girl and city boy move to the farm and grow an organic business from scratch! Once we started our company in 1991, we realized that, to expand the company, we were going to have to grow herbs – organic ones, naturally. After a few years of searching, we finally found our old sheep farm in the mountains northwest of Washington, DC and left the city behind us in 1996. Funny thing is, at first, I had a difficult time sleeping at night because it was too quiet! We had traded fire trucks, car alarms, traffic and the neighbor's loud music for the sound of wind in the leaves, tree frogs and a rushing stream.

STYLE

Diana Kaye

Co-founder of TerrEssentials

"Bake sales, not bailouts!"

What are your favorite items in your closet?

My favorite are my Eileen Fisher organic cotton knit pants and tees.

What are your favorite sustainable elements of your home?

We have a very eco home, but I think that, because we share our home with three smart and lovable rescued barn cats, we are particularly thrilled with our low-maintenance and non-toxic ceramic tile and concrete soy-stained floors!

What's your recommended summer reading list?

Ah, we're such book junkies, but since you asked: "*Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*" - by William McDonough and Michael Braungart, "*Collapse: Why Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*" - by Jared Diamond, "*A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage and the Quest for the Color of Desire*" - by Amy Butler Greenfield, "*Uncommon Fruits Worthy of Attention*" - by Lee Reich, "*Edible Wild Plants: A North American Field Guide*" - by Thomas Elias and Peter Dykeman, and "*Salt: A World History*" by Mark Kurlansky

Who is your green superhero?

My green superhero is my hub and partner, Jim. He has brilliant environmental ideas and is a powerful communicator. He cares deeply about our environmental problems and his super power is in creating solutions and effective vehicles for delivering instructions to people in a sticky and inspiring fashion (i.e. writing rap music and shooting our new organic rap video). Jim's superhero is Nikola Tesla because he invented free energy for everyone, but, unfortunately, the world wasn't ready for him, so he kept the secret to himself.

What keeps you up at night?

I am troubled by the condition of our planet's waterways. I've spent countless hours awake and in front of my computer until the wee hours of the morning researching the problems caused by human vanity and chemical pollution, and trying to devise palatable solutions to the problems. I feel badly for the animals that must drink or live in the water that is contaminated by the excess of modern human lifestyles.

What's your not-so-green guilty pleasure?

As I mentioned previously, I am a knowledge junkie. And that means that I do own many books. I buy many used books, but I also have many new books and most, unfortunately, are still not printed on

What has been your smallest lifestyle change?
We stopped using a dishwasher.

What's something you hope to pass down to future generations?

I love majestic trees. We are truly connected with and dependent upon trees because they give us sustenance. They evoke deep emotions in us. We are envious of their stable roots, their arms that perpetually reach up to the stars, and their strength, longevity and silent beauty. I have begun planting beautiful trees on our land so that future generations will have remarkable trees that they can fall in love with and find solace in.

What's your little green secret?

Over the years, I have indulged my passion for identifying and cultivating edible native and wild plants for food and medicine. Jim always jokes about my obsession with plants, but he has enjoyed my sautéed wild mushrooms and wild nettle soup, and lived to tell the tale, so he can't complain about my plant collection. I think everyone with and should create an edible landscape -- including stewards of public land.

If you had five minutes in the Oval Office, what would you say?

It's a good thing that I can talk fast! For starters, we must end corporate welfare for large, established and unsustainable businesses and close tax loopholes. Jim has coined a slogan about this: bake sales, not bailouts! Number two, we must stop burning fossil fuels! Jim recommends a Manhattan Project for alternative energy sources. Number three, we must address waste management issues in our communities and finance the construction and implementation of resource recovery parks and alternative wastewater treatment systems. Number four, we must dramatically elevate the status and salaries of our nation's teachers, and drastically alter the quality of the American educational system in order to create great thinkers, instill civic responsibility and encourage competitiveness.

100% recycled post-consumer chlorine-free paper and with soy-based inks. Sigh!

Which environmental groups and nonprofits get your stamp of approval?

The Organic Consumers Association and the Cornucopia Institute

What's on your wish list?

I want there to be an end to the fear-based, predatory body-altering marketing campaigns targeted to women and young girls that are utilized by cosmetic companies and too many plastic surgeons. Such campaigns are designed solely to destroy a woman's self esteem and to make her feel inadequate, inferior, unloved, unattractive and unworthy of success if she doesn't buy into the game of physically altering her body with (toxic) chemical "beauty" products, or submitting to unnecessary body-altering surgical procedures. On a completely different note, Jim wants to see bike lanes on every road and free bikes for everyone, and separate routes for trucks!

If you could snap your fingers and create a green product or service that doesn't exist yet, what would it be?

I want a composting, vented, litter box for cats! Did I mention that it should be self-cleaning, too?

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