



Maree Murphy.



Lemon balm, a de-stress tea favourite.



Bruising leaves.

Heavenly potions

Maree Murphy shares her unique health insurance with her clients.

Maree's home herb garden.





Maree demonstrates herb tea making.



Tinctures.



Maree's herbal creams.



JENNY SOMERVELL

Health insurance

It's a long and winding road to Maree Murphy's garden, rather like the road she travelled to become a medical herbalist. She lives perched at the top of a hill, fully exposed to Wellington's winds. It's not where you'd expect to find a productive herb garden.

It is only the first of many surprises. This tiny, diminutive woman does not look like she has had nine children. She also has a degree in science - she was the top science student at Otago University in 1970 - and worked as a secondary teacher, then in laboratory quality control. She was also a NZ table tennis champion.

The sporty scientist and high achiever with a priority for children and family also caught a love of gardening, and perhaps a dash of entrepreneurial flair, off her father.

"We lived on a quarter acre garden with two greenhouses and I used to sell tomatoes at the gate, sitting on a little wooden box, for two shillings and sixpence.

"I had three children under three and I was quite stressed when I discovered lemon balm tea - it was brilliant, very calming. Also, with little children there were many ailments and I started to think, 'do they have to have antibiotics?'"

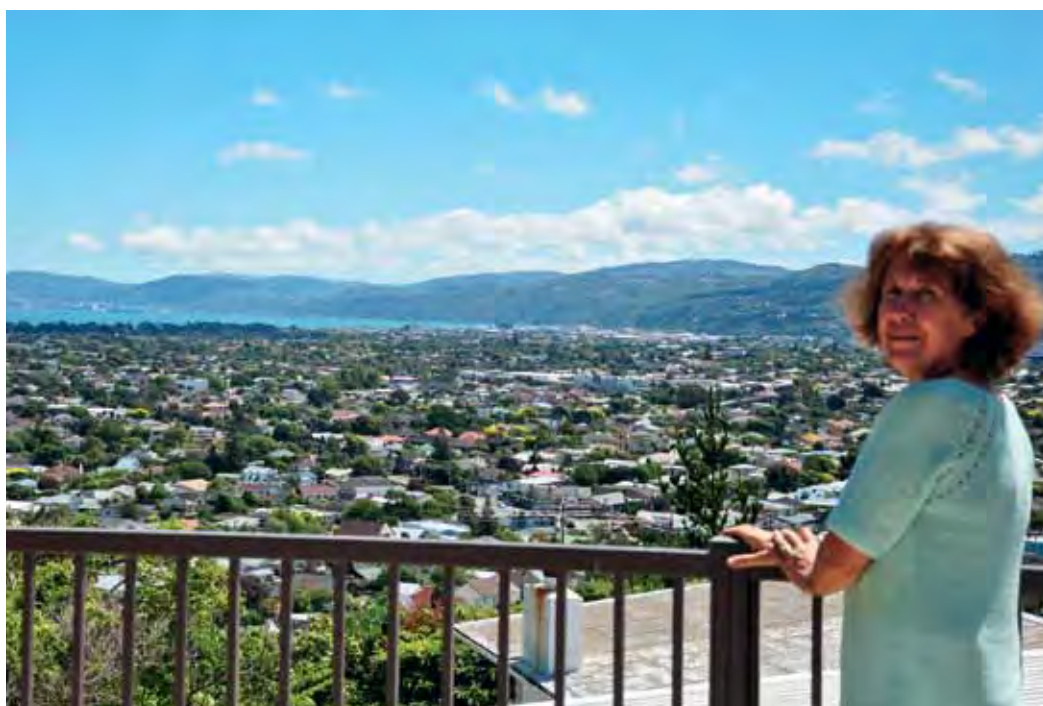
She began thinking there must be more to herbs than she realised - "After all, God gave the 'herbs of the field' for a reason" - and a few short courses later she began to realise there was a lot more to it.

Years passed and Maree's herb collection grew along with the children. When her adult son asked her if there was anything she wished she'd done differently, she replied she would rather have trained as a medical herbalist than done a science degree.

His reply, "Well, why don't you?" was a turning point. She found an online course that seemed to fit her needs and two weeks later, with encouragement from her husband, she started a three year Diploma in Herbal Medicine with the International College of Herbal Medicine.

"It was harder than I thought it would be, such as learning the actions and names of herbs but I had a head start. Four years of Latin at school was helpful for learning plant names and I was already growing herbs. I knew the knowledge was necessary and I had a passion for herbs, plus I wanted to be an example to my children. Once I start something, I see it through."

The course probably cost \$20,000 all up but Maree's husband saw it as health insurance. Neither of them take any medication and they seldom need to go to the doctor.



Maree's herb tea Christmas gifts.

Maree's 6 TIPS for staying healthy

- Drink lots of water
- Make sure you have enough down time
- Take a walk!
- Use deep breathing exercises
- Restrict sugar intake
- Drink four cups of green tea daily

Handfuls of meds

Since 2010 Maree has run Heavenly Herbs, a business with two sides: herbal consultations, and a product line developed largely in response to client requests.

"I see people come in with a handful of meds," she says. "I work to get to the cause of the problem rather than patch up the problem. The symptoms you have are simply your body's way of telling you something needs to change.

"I will look at what is happening in each body system to identify the problem causing the health imbalance. I work on three fronts: changes in nutrition, in lifestyle and the addition of herbs."

Maree sees good nutrition as the baseline.

"If you think of the body like a car, good food is the petrol and herbs are like oil and water, a top-up now and then to keep things running well."

To demonstrate, she cites a lady who came in with very high cholesterol who was also at risk of developing diabetes.

"I worked with her on changes in



nutrition and lifestyle. Then I added a herbal formula to help recycle old cholesterol and improve liver function. It contained milk thistle, dandelion, globe artichoke and other herbs.

"After three months her doctor said 'you are not at risk of diabetes anymore and your cholesterol is fine. Keep doing what you're doing.'"

Maree's clients range from people with long-term health conditions to those who have recently been diagnosed with an illness and want to avoid taking antibiotics.

Clients have been mostly women but increasingly she is seeing men and children. Typical issues are skin problems, low energy, constipation, gout, infertility, insomnia, eczema, ADHD, depression, and issues with menopause, menstruation, weight and stress.

Stress and illness

Stress is a huge factor in a number of illnesses.

"Often a client will come in with a number of issues - I will work at reducing stress first. When the stress comes right, a lot of other things come right."

A prescription can be something as simple as a relaxing tea using herbs like lemon balm, vervain, lavender and rose.

"I had a very stressed lady who came back to me and said, 'Wow, who needs drugs when you can buy this!' I assured her that everything in it was legal."

A lot of people come to her about weight loss.

"They've tried everything and want health gain with weight loss. I work on gradually increasing health while decreasing their weight."

When the liver is not working properly,

says Maree, there is a tendency to store toxins in fat. She uses a good liver formula (she says they aren't all good) which helps to move toxins and jolt weight loss.

"Some people are not very compliant nutrition-wise," says Maree. "A good nutrition base is very important. It's hard to make progress if you are going to eat chocolate four times a day."

Maree also loves how herbs will work at more than one level to provide exactly what the body needs, like dandelion which is a diuretic (increasing urine flow).

"With many orthodox diuretics, a potassium supplement is needed to compensate for the loss of potassium, whereas in dandelion the leaves have a naturally high content of potassium so the supplement is not needed."

Solving health puzzles

At about 18 hours a week - which includes Skype consults - Maree's business is small enough to respond to personal requests and solve health puzzles they present.

Many of her products have been developed from this work. People have come to her because they are sick of the side effects of sleeping tablets so she developed a sleep enhancing formulation containing hops, valerian and lemon balm. The local chemist is now interested in stocking it.

Other clients have been to skin specialists for fungal infections and skin rashes so Maree developed an antiseptic cream of NZ native plants including poroporo (a shrub) and others.

Creams and lotions were not something she intended getting into, but people kept asking for them.





Adding peppermint oil to tooth powder.



Pouring a cup of therapeutic herb tea.

“A lot of people have sensitive skin and we can be putting up to 150 chemicals on our skin a day with make-up, moisturisers, toothpastes etc. Finding them natural products is quite difficult. Even some of the so-called natural cosmetics still have obvious ‘baddies’ like sodium laurosulphate and parabens in them.”

She says a lot of natural sunscreens contain zinc oxide nanoparticles which may have toxic effects, and another concern are the phthalates contained in perfumes which may be toxic to the body. In response to this Maree has developed lavender and rose cream perfumes which contain all natural ingredients.

Four years into her business, she now has over 25 products, including sunscreens, varicose vein treatment, a cracked heel cream, anti-inflammatory cream, antiseptic cream and so on. She sees no point in reinventing the wheel: she uses an eczema cream from another herbalist “...because she was making a better one.”

Her experience in laboratories has given her confidence and skills in making creams in sterile conditions. She makes most of her tinctures herself using vodka

to extract the active ingredients, and collects her own plant material from her organic garden. The process of shaking and then straining takes nearly a month.

“Fewer herbalists are growing their own herbs,” she says. “I tend to think you get a stronger tincture using fresh herbs. Imported herbs can be good quality but they can also be cheap rubbish.”

For an inquiring scientific mind, her vocation is a good fit.

“I am absolutely loving it - I will probably be studying for the rest of my life. At the end of the day, you can’t buy health. And if you lose it, life is very difficult.”

Maree believes passionately that herbal medicine can positively improve a person’s health, and so do many of her clients.

For more information

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Plants With A Purpose

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Maree’s relaxing herb tea

Add three leaves per cup, per person.

- lemon balm
- vervain
- lavender
- pinch of rosemary

Bruise leaves to obtain maximum effectiveness. Pour just boiled water over herbs and cover for about 5 minutes before drinking.

Make your own herbal tooth powder

Maree has been using her own tooth cleaner after looking at the ingredients in toothpaste.

“Toothpaste contains a lot of rubbish, including sodium laurosulphate, a known carcinogen, which may damage the DNA in cells.”

Baking soda helps neutralise plaque, natural sweetener stevia helps fight dental disease, and cinnamon is anti-bacterial.

- 2 tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp stevia
- pinch of cinnamon
- 3 drops peppermint essential oil

Mash baking soda to get the lumps out, add stevia, cinnamon and a few drops of peppermint oil. Mix and store in a glass jar. To use, add some of the powder to a little jar, wet toothbrush, dip in jar and clean teeth. This should last about a week - when empty, wash and dry the jar and replenish from the master jar.



6 Questions you should ask yourself before choosing your next plant supplier...

1. Is the nursery a reputable one, with a great track record? – **YES!**
2. Will the stock quality be second to none? – **OF COURSE!**
3. Will they give me a free quote on my landscape plan? – **ABSOLUTELY!**
4. Will I get really great value for money? – **ALWAYS!**
5. Are the staff experienced and able to offer advice on avenue trees, hedging etc? – **YOU BET!**
6. Can the stock be freighted locally and nationwide? – **NO PROBLEM!**

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