

# BLOOM MICROGREENS

## Fresh, Local—and Even Home-Delivered

BY HILARY GRANT

Those of us who live to eat, and also get to live on the Central Coast, know that we're an exceptionally lucky group.

Thanks to bountiful farmlands and pastures, there's a farmers market to be found literally every day of the week, and family produce stands are open most of the year. Then there are the many eclectic chefs who have discovered this region: because of them, we now have restaurants that specialize in fresh, local and often all-organic ingredients.

Now there's another reason for celebration—Bloom Microgreens, the only microgreens company in San Luis Obispo County.

Owner Kara Wood grows and harvests the tiny, vividly-colored plants – defined as the smallest version of lettuce, shoots, herbs, edible flowers and leafy vegetables that you can get—from a large greenhouse adjacent to Clark Valley Farm (see page 14). Started less than two years ago in her Los Osos garage with former spouse Michael, a chef, Wood's company now offers nearly 40 kinds of greens and is hard at work creating more, in addition to constructing a second greenhouse because of demand for the greens.

Varieties include the tiniest of onion chives, basil, cilantro and popcorn shoots (the first green that Bloom ever grew), as well as Sunshine and Rainbow, two unique Bloom mixes. Used in salads, sandwiches, soups, pizzas, casseroles, dips and a variety of other dishes, a little goes a very long way: just a sprinkling treats palates to super-intense flavors that simply aren't found anywhere else.

"The chefs around here ask for us because our greens bring foods to another level of intensity," says Wood. Restaurants, including Artisan, Villa Creek, Paso Robles Inn Steakhouse and Big Sky Cafe are regular clients; Bloom products are also available at New Frontiers Natural Marketplace and The Natural Food Co-op, both in San Luis Obispo, and Sunshine Health Food Market, in Morro Bay. If you're fortunate enough to live in Los Osos, Wood also offers free home delivery every Friday.

Beyond their brilliant color and pop-in-your-mouth taste, Wood says that microgreens "have amazing nutritional benefits." That's because, she says, these infant seedlings, which are not sprouts, offer one of the most concentrated sources of vitamins, minerals, enzymes, trace elements, amino acids and proteins on the planet. In fact, microgreens are thought to be part of a newly named group called "functional foods"—that is, food products containing specific



Kara Wood (right) and Claudia Gwinn of Bloom Microgreens



health-promoting, or disease-preventing, properties in addition to their normal nutritional values.

Bloom Microgreens is different from most other microgreen businesses because Wood grows each tiny plant in a rich mixture of the best soil around. Most other companies, she explains, use hydroponics (Greek for “water working,” it means growing plants in water instead of dirt). Besides the nutritional benefit, Wood prefers dirt for one simple reason: she says her product tastes better this way.

Nonetheless, Wood points out that “we still grow nothing in the ground. What we do is use miniature containers, using the most premium, nutrient-rich soil. And, new soil is used with each new seed planting.”

All of this intense babying takes a good amount of time—but Wood isn’t complaining.

With the help of assistant Claudia Gwinn (“She works by my side everyday, and honestly, I don’t think I could do it without her,” says Wood), the greens must be pampered and watched over every day of the week. Once ready to be harvested, each microgreen is then cut and packaged by hand. It’s a delicate operation, and must be done carefully and mindfully in order to assure maximum output and taste.

“I’m usually at the greenhouse three to four hours three days a week,” says Wood. Other days are spent delivering the greens, with Sundays being the longest work day since that’s when she harvests the entire Bloom product for grocery clients and personal customers. “Add with all the bookkeeping, marketing and managing of existing relationships,” she says, “it turns out to be a very busy week! “But I love my job so much that I don’t even count the hours.

What does the future hold for Bloom Microgreens?

“This has to be the hardest question for me to answer,” says Wood. “I definitely want to continue to grow my client base, and become more of a presence to the Central Coast community. In five years, I’ll have expanded into providing edible flowers and other new products.

“I do know this,” she continues. “Bloom will be a spectacular company to watch. I’m working to take the right steps, right now, to become the sustainable, community-focused business I dream it to be. I already know that I’m blessed to have the opportunity to live and work right here—one of the most beautiful places in the country.”

*For more information about Bloom Microgreens, log on to bloommicrogreens.com. Reach Kara Wood at 528-4805.*

Photographs: Kristin Amundsen





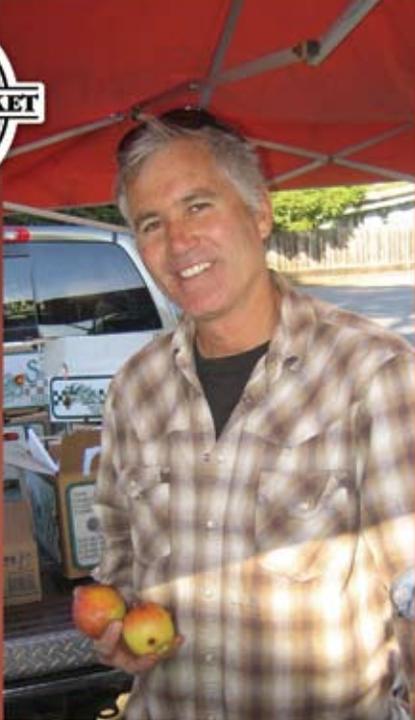
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