



by Susan Jewitt-Colby 'Zit Zapper' and 'Mozzie Mutis' are just two of the many interesting phrases you'll hear when you talk to Diane Aldworth of Hildcote Hill B&B in Mooi River, KwaZulu-Natal. This talented lady has reinvented her life, switching gears from a high-stress clothing business in Empangeni to producing lotions and potions and many other things on her farm. "It's a real change of pace," she laughs, waving her arm in front of her for all to see. "See, no watch."

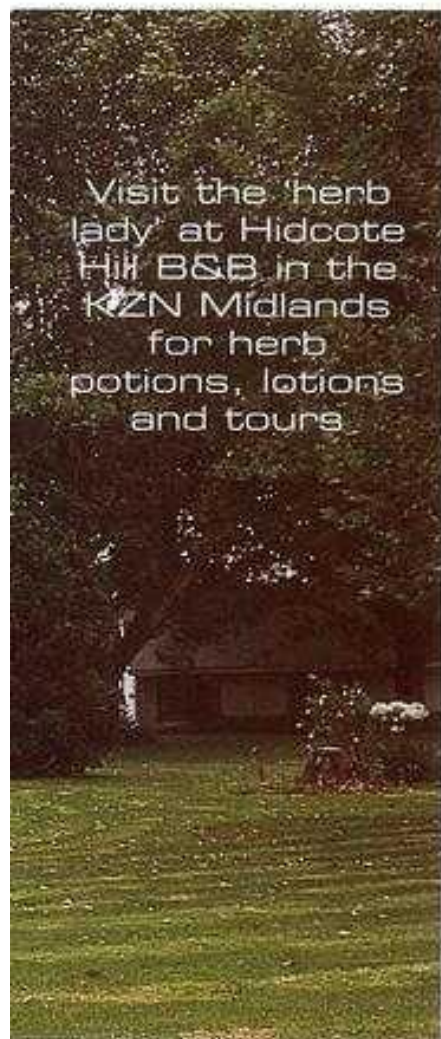
But being on the farm hasn't really slowed Diane down at all. It hardly took any time before she was back in business. Though her new projects are a far cry from running a clothing factory, they require just as much energy, creativity and enthusiasm.

"I spent the first year on the farm getting it organised and setting up the house as a B&B," says Diane, admitting that after that she felt at a bit of a loose end. However, after attending the Joan Lawrence Symons Open Day in Estcourt, she became convinced of something – and that was her passion for herbs. And after only a year of training she started teaching a popular one-year herb course, which entails meetings once a month, homework and research.

"I'm not a herbalist," she emphasises. "I teach people to use herbs safely." Di's students are taught to identify and use herbs and weeds that grow locally. "They learn how to make basic creams using things like comfrey and chickweed, which are both great for eczema," she says. They also learn to make tinctures from the herbs.

"My mutis taste terrible but they work," laughs Di. She opens a large, antique cupboard in the classroom and displays her mutis. The dark glass bottles of various shapes and sizes hold a veritable cornucopia of potions and lotions. "Smell this," she says, waving the mouth of the bottle under my nose. "*Crataegus oxyacantha* in brandy. A tot a night regulates the heart," she asserts. "Use Devils Claw for aches and pains," she continues, pulling more bottles out of the cupboard. "All the students learn how to make these, and they also learn all about how the herbs work in the body." Her students include pharmacists, homeopaths and reflexologists. "They are a real mixed bag," she smiles.

With students coming from all walks of life and from across the country, Di recently decided to expand her work and offer



Visit the 'herb lady' at Hidcote Hill B&B in the KZN Midlands for herb potions, lotions and tours



OPPOSITE The house where the 'herb lady' lives - Hidcote Hill B&B.

ABOVE Diane and student Rosemary Drew inspect dried herbs hanging in the classroom.

herb tours from Hidcote Hill. "I want people to see more than just the herb gardens we currently visit," Di says, so she now includes meals at local cafes and restaurants around the Midlands. The tour is far-ranging in scope, taking in the Durban Botanical Gardens, Glenbella Farm in Estcourt, Lavendula Lavender Farm as well as Petersgate, KwaZulu-Natal's largest herb farm. A visit to the herb-drying and processing plant at Meadow Sweet Herb Farm in Winterton is also featured on the itinerary. A highlight of the tour is a visit to the Inkomfe Cluster Project run by Dr Elliot Ndlovu, a well-known sangoma who is preserving threatened indigenous plants. The visit will include a walk in the veld with Dr Ndlovu, who will identify the plants in their natural state.

"As a nation we have never appreciated our heritage," sighs Di, telling me how the Voortrekkers used the plants and weeds.

To complement the work she is doing, Di has taken up an old passion of hers and put it to good use. "I've always drawn things," she says, "and my publisher decided that my book, *The Wonder of Weeds*, should be illustrated - by me." So she picked up her paints and produced delightful renditions of the plants she talks about in her classes. "This is the first of a series of books.

The next one will be on edible herbs such as carrots and beetroot," she says. "Most people think of them as vegetables, but they are actually herbs."

Diane's own herb garden is her personal inspiration and she wanders through it, gently touching each plant and explaining its use. "It grows every year," she says, pointing out the original plot that is now dwarfed by the expanse of plants surrounding it. Her next project in the garden is a herb labyrinth. "It will be such a peaceful place under the trees where people can meditate or just sit and enjoy the view.

"Everything in life has led me to this," says the herb lady of Hidcote Hill.

So next time you're weeding that overgrown flowerbed, think twice before tossing the weeds on the rubbish pile. They could hold the cure to something that ails you. 🐉

For map reference see inside back cover

Hidcote Herbs ☎ 033 263 1227  
or email dragonair@futurenet.co.za