

Tea time: Drink up and be healthy

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Green tea has long been promoted for its health benefits, including its anti-aging properties and immune-boosting capabilities.

Well, there's a new brew in town and an Abbotsford woman is making it her business to spread the word.

Liz Bandelin is the president of Nu-Tea Imports, which she began 18 months ago to distribute a South African tea known as Rooibos (pronounced roy-boss, meaning "red bush" for the plant from which it is produced).

Bandelin said the beverage, which research shows has 50 times the antioxidants as the highly acclaimed green tea, has caught on in parts of Europe but is just now gaining popularity in Canada.

She said there's everything to love about the tea.

"The amazing thing is that it tastes great and it's good for you," Bandelin said.

Let's start with taste. Bandelin said Rooibos does not have the "herbally" flavour of some organic teas nor does it have the bitter aftertaste of some black teas.

She said Rooibos tea bags can be steeped all day and never develop the tinny flavour of some other teas.

It's this unique flavour that is prompting the food industry to come on board.

Bandelin currently has 14 chefs lined up - with more possibilities to join - for a recipe competition taking place this Thursday at the Westin Bayshore in Vancouver. (The event is not open to the public.)

Participants are asked to create a new taste sensation using Rooibos tea and B.C. gala apples.

The winner receives \$1,000 and an elephant sculpture made from Ngwenya glass from the Kingdom of Swaziland - a nod to the African roots of Rooibos.

Bandelin hopes the attention will encourage more restaurants to use the product in their cooking and as a beverage choice for their customers.

She has already convinced 165 retail outlets - including health-food stores and Save-On-Foods - throughout Canada to sell the tea. Bandelin's goal is to reach 250 by the end of the year.

She said it has been an easy sell. That's where the health benefits come into play.

The organically produced caffeine-free drink has a range of health dividends that include improved immunity, reduction in high blood pressure, soothing sore stomachs, relief from allergies and a reduction in stress.

Bandelin herself consumes eight cups or more a day.



COLLEEN FLANAGAN / The Abbotsford News

Liz Bandelin displays the Rooibos tea sold by her company and the glass sculpture that will be awarded to the winner of a chefs' recipe competition using the tea. The contest takes

"I do feel that I'm less stressed. I'm sort of a high-stressed person so the tea really works for me to help me de-stress," she said.

Bandelin said many female customers have told her that the tea has alleviated their menopausal night sweats and hot flashes.

Rooibos also contains nine essential minerals and 50 times the defensive natural antioxidants found in green tea.

If that's not enough, a portion of profits goes towards the children's AIDS crisis in Africa. The nation is dear to Bandelin's heart. She was born and raised there until she immigrated to West Berlin with her husband, Klaus.

The couple and their two sons left after the fall of the Berlin wall and settled in Canada. Bandelin worked for years in the software industry, but lost her job due to downsizing. She compiled a list of business ideas, after researching future trends. Bandelin produced 26 options, including starting a tea business.

She was flipping through Faith Popcorn's book Dictionary of the Future when the word "Rooibos" caught her eye. "Rooibos is the tea that I knew from my childhood, and what really amazed me is the incredible research that has been done in the last 30 years," Bandelin said.

She has also had a long-time interest in health and wellness, and it was an easy decision where to develop her business interests.

"It's an absolute fit because of my passion for health and wellness, my passion for South Africa and my passion to help AIDS kids in Africa."

Bandelin has big plans for expanding the business. She hired marketing director Ken Etheridge, who designed all the promotional material and packaging using strong African artistic influences.

Next, she is adding six new flavours to the original red tea version. These include Buchu, Chai and Hhoneybush - each with their own health properties.

Bandelin said the tea provides a winning formula.

"Everyone who drinks it, their health is going to benefit from it; African kids are going to benefit from it. It's just a product that you can't lose," she said.

For more information, visit the Web site www.nu-tea.com