

nz's earth angels

TO MICHELLE DAWSON AND RUTH PATTERSON, SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT ONLY WHAT THEY PRACTISE BUT IT IS ALSO WHAT THEY PREACH.

Michelle and Ruth are the directors of Earth Angel, New Zealand's foremost sustainability web store that assists businesses and households to take action towards a sustainable future. Earth Angel offers an incredible range of products, including worm farms, cleaners, personal care, fun art and educational books that have been, until now, hard to source, and this range is constantly growing.

Earth Angel began as a business idea of Michelle's over ten years ago. She currently works full time for a city council in a sustainability role and has been broadening her skills in this area over the past nine years. Today, Earth Angel is developing quite a following amongst New Zealand households and, now, businesses.

"We are finding that more and more businesses are developing internal sustainability programmes and are beginning to purchase our products to assist them to implement sustainability initiatives," says Michelle.

"Earth Angel is an after-hours job for us so time is always a factor but we definitely enjoy it and love what we do."

The pair feels the Internet has given them the ability to get the venture on the go faster as they do not have a shop front. They run everything online and from home, which has helped keep operational costs to a minimum.

"In the sustainability field, there are a lot of people starting small businesses and having the Internet is one thing that greatly supports this," says Ruth. "It is fantastic to see like-minded New Zealanders putting their passions into businesses for the greater good."

Products such as beautiful recycled glass platters, potato pack plates and wooden cutlery – for zero plastic waste functions, food waste bins with biofilm bags made from corn starch, recycled paper stationery, safe cleaners, books on sustainability, gardening and business strategy and a cool children's range. Their best sellers are worm farms, which come with live worms too! All are available to purchase online and are delivered to the customer's door. A worm farm can reduce around half a household's waste to landfill and around twenty percent for an office. Installing a worm farm can also be a great way to gain buy-in from staff before implementing other

sustainability initiatives – they love to take the worm castings and liquid home for their gardens.

Ruth and Michelle have both been passionate and motivated about sharing knowledge with others around adopting sustainable practices and ideas that people can implement in their homes and businesses. Michelle runs the website and a 'hotline' for all customers of Earth Angel who have purchased a worm farm so she can assist in ensuring the farm is doing what it should do best. They are firm believers in following your passion and doing what makes you proud.

"When I walk past a rubbish bin, I always look in to see what has been thrown away and what could have been recycled or composted and advise who I can to fix it," says Michelle.

Ruth is enthusiastic about the new personal care range she has sourced that is free from petrochemicals, parabens and has New Zealand handmade herbals.

The pair has noticed that many New Zealanders are willing to make small, practical changes such as reducing their use of various plastics, switching off plugs and either composting or recycling more waste. All these small steps add up and make a difference. Earth Angel are active participants in many lifestyle expos, which they feel is a perfect opportunity to get out there and speak to people about small changes they can make to reduce waste and add more back to the environment.

Earth Angel was a finalist for The David Awards 2008 for Fledgling Business (under two years young, smart, quirky, or just very professionally set up) for small businesses. The award recognises up and coming entrepreneurs in home and small business ventures.

This month, Earth Angel is celebrating its second birthday and both Michelle and Ruth say they are excited about the future of Earth Angel and what can be done to encourage people to lead sustainable lifestyles.

By Xenia M Foote

Visit: www.earthangel.co.nz

