

GROWERTALKS

Under an Acre

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Investing in a Legacy

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Brea Segger, owner of Ravenhill Herb Farm, grew up in the Cowichan Valley in British Columbia on a piece of property with a large backyard.

“I remember going to a dairy farm and telling my parents I wanted to be a farmer,” she shared. “My parents quickly dismissed it, saying that there was no money in farming.”

She completed a degree in corporate finance and spent most of her 20s completing merger and acquisition work in Vancouver.

“At one point, I realized I missed nature and so I went back to school in Victoria and pursued a degree in geography, focusing on connecting peoples and resources,” said Brea. Uncertain of her next career move, Brea made the decision to venture to Zanzibar, Tanzania, to teach English and business skills to college students. It was there that she met her future husband Todd Howard, who was working at their on-site natural medicine clinic.

Pictured: Brea Segger, owner of Ravenhill Herb Farm, knew she was going to be a farmer at a very young age. Ravenhill Herb Farm has over 175 chickens on the property. Brea's daughter Ella holds a little chick.

When their time in Zanzibar was coming to an end, Todd invited Brea to assist him with the overall operation of his college in herbal medicine at Pacific Rim College in Victoria, BC. She agreed and the couple ventured back to Canada, motivated to embark onto the next part of their career journey.

No matter which career adventure Brea had embarked on, her home space was surrounded by living plants.

“Even when I lived on the 17th story of an apartment, it was always green,” said Brea. “I loved filling my space with plants, splitting them and watching them grow.”

She shared that she's always felt the most connected when immersed in nature. It didn't take long for Brea to realize that what she really wanted to do when she wasn't working was to grow food and have animals.

So she began to convert the 700 sq. yd. of their townhouse into a massive vertical garden that included both exotic

and traditional produce, including lemons, limes, apple, cherries, vegetables and herbs. Brea fondly recalls that every nook and cranny of the small space was filled with food, which although at times made it difficult to navigate around, it was able to feed her family for close to half of the year.

"I was amazed by what I could grow in that space," she said. "It was an experiment, reading and testing what could grow in vertical farming."

Little did she know that this small space would serve as a training ground for her next adventure—Ravenhill Herb Farm.

Ravenhill Herb Farm has been a part of the Saanichton, BC, community for close to a century. However, it was the work of the previous owners, Noel Richardson and Andrew Yeoman, that transformed this space into a local landmark. During the '80s, prior to the farm-to-table movement, the owners connected their local culinary community to the importance of local ingredients, providing culinary herbs and fresh produce.

"They were integral at inspiring the organic food movement," said Brea. "Noel published four books over her lifetime, weaving recipes and stories about the farm life, while her spouse Andrew became well known for composting, writing a manual and creating an education hub at the farm."

When Ravenhill Herb Farm went onto the market in 2014, the couple embraced the opportunity. Noel and Andrew had passed away, and their family was seeking out individuals who would be able to continue with their legacy.

The first year of farm life was far from a simple one. It involved a massive clean-up, as Brea attempted to regenerate what she could while also increasing the overall growing space of the property.

"The former owners were no longer able to maintain the property; however, it was through the clean-up that we discovered some incredible gems, including the foundation of their original herb garden," said Brea.

They discovered several perennial herbs, including sage and rosemary, which they sold at their on-site farm. Wanting to preserve the original philosophy of the farm, culinary and medicinal herbs became an integral part of what Brea and Todd nourished in their new farm. But the couple didn't stop there—they also wanted to explore animal farming and the potential of exotic produce, taking advantage of the Mediterranean-like climate.

"Once I commit to do something, I figure it out," said Brea. "I love just diving in and doing it."

Today, Ravenhill Herb Farm has approximately 175 chickens—all heritage breeds—that are pasture-raised, eating both the grubs and grasses on the farm. Brea also continues to explore the possibilities of a variety of produce in her climate zone, including growing pomegranate, lemon, lime, guava and lemongrass in their onsite hoophouse.

The couple also have brought their love of education directly onto their farm, creating an on-site classroom and a space to share their knowledge and experience with others. Throughout the year, the couple conducts school tours, culinary workshops and training sessions focused on permaculture and regenerative farming. They've also introduced a one-year permaculture program at Pacific Rim College, integrating the classroom education with the hands-on experience. The two career paths, education and agriculture, work seamlessly well together.

"Our jobs at the college allow us to work from home the majority of the time," said Brea, allowing their teaching background to help evolve Ravenhill Herb Farm into an education hub.

When asked for what she would advise others thinking of venturing into farming, she quickly stated the key to being successful is making sure you're doing something you love.

"I will give the most attention to the plants and animals that I love," said Brea. "Over the years, I've discovered that when I grow plants, like my experimentation with goji berries that I don't like, I fail to provide them with the attention

that they need.”

Today, she focuses on growing the food that interests her the most, which recently includes several varieties of heritage tomatoes and an experiment with pine nuts.

“It’s so much work and there is a huge time investment, but when it’s something that you’re passionate about, it makes it all worthwhile,” said Brea. “I know that we’ve created a place where people can come and find food that they can’t find at the grocery store. But that’s not all—it’s a space where people can, once again, become excited about food.” **GT**

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