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Helen Nestor's Dandelion Mud Pie is dedicated to originality. Nestor, seen sitting beside the shop's living wall, carries one-of-a-kind handcrafted goods from local Canadian artists.

Naturally maternal gifts found at Dandelion Mud Pie

By: Rita Zekas Special to the Star, Published on Sat May 10 2008

If you've left it to the last minute to get your maternal parental unit something for tomorrow that doesn't involve tulips or chocolate and that's also a gift to Mother Earth, get on over to eco-friendly Dandelion Mud Pie at 6 Fairlawn Ave., five blocks north of Lawrence Ave. on the west side of Yonge St.

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There is even a tiny plot of green grass out front that owner Helen Nestor is trying to cultivate, with organic seeds (\$3.99 a pack), soil and fertilizer.

Nestor was formerly the public relations manager of the Hummingbird Centre, now the Sony Centre. She decided to reinvent herself after 20 years in the PR biz and has been open for six months.

As for the name: "My sister and I made mud pies as kids and we stuck in dandelions. I needed something personal and quirky that means something to me and dandelions are strong, resilient and also great healing plants. Making mud pies represented such a joyous time as kids and cost nothing. People really relate to it."

Dandelion carries one-of-a-kind handcrafted goods from local Canadian artists, including jewellery, body care products, decor accessories and furniture. When you go through the door, you fear that it's just another crunchy-granola shop. It's overcrowded with stock – crammed with goodies but there's nary a Birkenstock in sight. There are, however, those ubiquitous earth-toned T-shirts made of bamboo. With so much bamboo clothing around these days, Store Gazing is surprised the pandas haven't instituted a protest. The shop also features organic cotton, hemp and soy clothes.

Here are some suggestions that leave a negligible carbon footprint.

Sporty Mom: An ingenious coat rack constructed of discarded cross-country skis made in London, Ont., by Sue Bedell and priced at \$275. Bedell found the skis in the garbage.

"The skis come from all over," Nestor says. "From Sweden, Norway and one from the U.S.S.R. The tree stump on which it is mounted comes from her property. A woman bought one for her kid's room but it would be great for a cottage. And Sue will customize it if you want more hooks."

Bag Lady Mom: Wonderful bags made by Tracy Crandall in Port Hope of recycled strips of fabric from shirts, T-shirts and pants, with the strips crocheted together and a vintage belt serving as the handle. Some of them even have bits of buttons and zippers still attached.

"She found a potter to make a one-of-a-kind button and there is reclaimed fabric inside the bag," elaborates Nestor. They range from \$69 for a small bag to \$125.

Decorator Mom: Woven balls made of rattan cost only \$4 and would look great amassed in a glass jar or wooden bowl as a centrepiece on Mom's dining room table.

There are message boards assembled from reclaimed barn board and school chalkboards priced at \$65. Add a fireplace grate and the price goes up to \$225. A mirror made from an old window frame features cut-out stars and is stickered at \$85.

Green Thumb Mom: A birdhouse recycled from an old mailbox by Catie Raymond for \$75. What a great conversation/conservation piece for the backyard. Also, natural insect repellents, sunscreens and natural bug sprays.

Or how about a cool mobile made from old cutlery, bits and bobs of wiring and jewellery or the old wire coat hangers that were anathema to Joan Crawford, which Mom could hang out on her favourite tree in the backyard to amuse the guests or annoy the neighbours.

Pet Loving Mom: A dog bed made from recycled fabric and stuffed with plastic priced at \$75. It is flea resistant because fleas can't live in plastic.

Mad Hatter Mom: A knit cloche that is very flapper and only \$30.

Clean Freak Mom: A basket of biodegradable home cleaning products including mould and stain removers.

Sourcing the stock is one big treasure hunt for Nestor.

"I go out of my way to find unique, reclaimed pieces gentle on the environment," she says. "I find things daily online; I go to shows; and people who are doing it quietly in their homes contact me. I try to stay as local as possible."

For a total no-brainer, Nestor has assembled fun-themed gift baskets made from twigs with prices under \$50. There is a Zen basket with candle in a recycled candle holder; or a pamper basket with a recycled ceramic soap dish, soap, massage cream and lavender.

Or make your own pamper basket from a selection of natural skin creams, cosmetics, soaps, shampoos, deodorants, moisturizers and toothpastes. Green Beaver toothpaste is only \$5 and comes in a number of flavours including cilantro mint. It must work. We all know how great beavers' teeth are.

Nestor stocked the Sigrid line of cosmetics after recommendations from a customer.

"Your skin is your largest organ and you are eating what is in it," Nestor says. "Everything in the Sigrid line is edible: beeswax, almond oil, and she makes it in a food processor at her home. She will even personalize your skin cream and she does a weekend retreat in Algonquin Park where she teaches you how to make it."

Now that's a great Mother's Day gift: A retreat in Algonquin Park.

Just throw in the sheet music for "Kumbaya."