

## NEIGHBORHOOD JOINT | DITMAS PARK



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# Take Mugwort And Call Us In a Week

By NOAH ROSENBERG

**D**RAGON'S blood incense, musky and sweet, burns from an altar. The rich smoke wafts across an 18th-century Bible and through shimmering peacock feathers, mingling in midair with hundreds of allies: roasted dandelion root, Irish moss flakes, horny goat weed, astragalus.

The result is something of a sensory Olympiad, with colors and textures — orange and red powders, purple and black tonics — competing with scents that are at once bitter, sweet, spicy, earthy.

Even with Bob Marley on the stereo, one might be forgiven for confusing Sacred Vibes Apothecary, on Argyle Road in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, with Harry Potter's herbal remedies class.

Except, at the two-year-old Sacred Vibes, one of just a few herbal apothecaries in the city, according to the owner, Karen Rose, plant

concoctions are not magic potions for invisibility, good fortune or revenge. They are, Ms. Rose says, accessible remedies for ailments as hackneyed as allergies, migraines or even poor sexual performance, and as complex as fibromyalgia or diabetes.

"What motivates me is making people understand that they can heal themselves just by taking herbs," said Ms. Rose, 39, who was introduced to herbal medicine in her native Guyana, where, she said, many people did not have access to traditional health care.

Years of formal herbal education in the United States followed, resulting in Sacred Vibes, where Ms. Rose and her employee, Jessica Hammel, 39, also offer herbology workshops and nature walks. They treat their customers like family, imparting wisdom and personalized care the way pharmacists of a bygone era did.

On a recent Saturday, a neighborhood resident burst through the door of the 600-square-foot storefront, right off the bustling Cortelyou Road.

"What would you suggest to bring on a really strong menstrual flow?" she asked, making a beeline for Ms. Rose. The woman, who said she was not pregnant, said she had tried everything including acupuncture and massage and still, after five weeks, had not gotten her period.

Ms. Rose suggested a custom blend of penny royal herb, mugwort and squaw vine. She told the woman to call her if the mixture, consumed as a hot tea, did not do the trick. (A week later, the woman had not called — a promising

sign, Ms. Rose said.)

Well aware that not every New Yorker has the time, or the inclination, to steep and sip a cup of tea, Ms. Rose and Ms. Hammel offer their line of herbal remedies in a variety of tinctures, tonics, syrups, capsules and elixirs. They give them catchy, often humorous, names, like "Drop It Like It's Hot" (a weight-loss blend) and "Bless You Again" (an anti-allergy concoction).

Sacred Vibes' products, mostly prepared in-house from ingredients bought from American suppliers, range in price from \$3.50 for an ounce of nonmedicinal "pleasure teas" to \$40 for a month's supply of multivitamins.

Among the store's best sellers are horny goat weed and maca root powder, which, Ms. Rose said, can enhance libido, sexual longevity and sperm count.

"Both of them can work for men and women, but it seems the men are totally sold on it," she said with a laugh. And, that's fine in Ms. Rose's book, as long as she is introducing new customers to her world.

Like Gennady Prosmushkin and his wife, Inna Sankina, from nearby Ocean Parkway. The couple recently stumbled upon Sacred Vibes for the first time, and bought mango Ceylon tea (organic and fair trade, from Sri Lanka). Such variety, Mr. Prosmushkin, 64, said, was "unthinkable, absolutely incomprehensible" in his native Russia.

"Now," he concluded, glancing around the shop, with its neat stacks of herbal health books and Buddha statues, "we're probably going to be regulars."

