

by Kimberley Brown Seely
Sea harvester

Take a seaweed tour on Vancouver Island



"Seaweed plants are the healthiest plants on the planet," says Diane Bernard. That's why she decided to found Outer Coast Seaweeds, a four-year-old company that sells hand-harvested wild seaweeds to the region's top restaurants and spas and offers guided seaweed tours for the rest of us. From May through September, Bernard outfits groups with rubber boots and marches them through low-tide fields of alaria (winged kelp), egregia (feather boa), and fucus (rockweed).

People are typically leery about nibbling on the stuff, Bernard says. But before long, she's got them snacking on celery-like ribs of alaria or wrapping themselves in rockweed. At the end of a two-hour session, tour groups can have lunch at nearby Sooke Harbour House, where celebrated chef Edward Tuson has been cooking with seaweed for years. Bits of Bernard's harvest also turn up in spa treatments at upscale resorts like Victoria's Delta Ocean Pointe and in a new line of facial products (a seaweed mask, a moisturizing cream, and a seaweed serum) available through spas and the Outer Coast website.

The business is fun and creative, but to Bernard it's about more than playing with marine plants; it's about changing seaweed's image. "Canadians have exceptional wild resources — it's important to me that we don't take them for granted," she says. "Even kelp can create jobs and add to our quality of life." **-KIMBERLY BROWN SEELY**

Go forage

Outer Coast Seaweeds tours (\$33 per person; or 250/642-5328) leave from Whitten Spit in Sooke, B.C.