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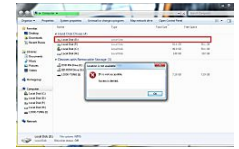
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French chocolatier's Brazilian twist on the classic chocolate flavour

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Founder of Wildness Chocolate Marie Monmont employs prisoners from Rimutaka and Tawa prisons to package her chocolate bars.

A French Wellingtonian businesswoman is employing prisoners to introduce Kiwis to a new kind of chocolate.

Cupuacu, pronounced ku-poo-ah-soo, is a Brazilian fruit that's part of the cacao family. It's tangy, tart, but sweet with pale flesh.

Founder of Wildness chocolate Marie Monmont visited Brazil for a holiday five years ago and discovered the untapped potential of the cupuacu plant. With more than six years of French culinary training under her belt she decided to find out what to make with it.

KEVIN STENT/FAIRFAX NZ

Organic Wildness chocolate with cupuacu dipped in acai berry juice, and pulp from the cupuacu plant.

Monmont now sells vegan, organic chocolate bars nationwide and employs prisoners at Rimutaka and Tawa prisons to package the bars.

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Originally from a rural town near Lyon, France, Monmont moved to Serra Grande, Brazil in 2012 for three years, raising three children on a farm with no electricity and no kitchen.

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Cupuacu plants are similar to cacao but have a more tart flavour.

"We lived in the forest and were surrounded by fruits: mango, papaya, cacao, coconut, banana, everything. But I saw that for every cacao tree there was a cupuacu tree," she said.

She tried cupuacu and knew instantly she wanted to work with the flavour. It had already been made into lollies and ice cream in Brazil but the flavour was too sweet.

Monmont, like many chefs, wants to introduce people to new tastes. So she worked with cupuacu for years to create a palatable chocolate bar.

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Wildness chocolate bars are vegan, organic laden with chunks of the cupuacu fruit.

"There's not many people here doing that with chocolate, there hasn't been anything really new in 60 years," she said.

She convinced Carlos, a Serra Grande farmer with 3000 cupuacu trees, to partner with her.

The fruit is picked all year round and doesn't have a season and the chocolate is made in Brazil so plant waste materials can be reused.

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Wildness chocolate is made using the Brazilian fruit cupuacu.

Cacao and cupuacu husks are put back at the base of trees so the soil can absorb the potassium and magnesium.

After just 10 months, Wildness products are being bought by Intercontinental and Accor hotel chains, are sold in stores and supermarkets around New Zealand, and used in some restaurants.

"When I started the business, I wanted to connect the dots between business, the environment, and the people," she said.

Monmont looked into who had the hardest time finding work and landed on prisoners. She contacted the Department of Corrections and asked to employ prisoners at Tawa and Rimutaka prisons.

"They're paid and I'm teaching them entrepreneurial skills. I started this business on my own and I teach them how I did it," she said.

"They like the work. They like spending time with someone from the outside who is not an officer and is a foreigner.

"I'm a foreigner with a thick accent and a lot of them have never travelled. They ask me a lot of questions about the fruit and how it grows."

Monmont is now working on a project with prisoners called Behind Bars.

The project will have prisoners manufacture and package cupuacu granola bars from scratch.

"I think there is a new wave of business coming where when you build your business from scratch and you build it from thought. How can I be environmentally friendly, how can I improve.

"Our generation is ready for this. It's harder to make a buck, but it's not about just making money."

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