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## a chat with koala eco founder jessica bragdon

We chat with founder of Koala Eco: Jessica Bragdon about parenting, starting up in a new business and what nature means to her and those around her.

### Describe Koala Eco?

It's a company that wants to bring more nature into people's everyday lives. So we make plant-based products for the home and body, using beautiful aromatic essential oils from Australian native botanicals. These essential oils not only have incredible antiseptic and antibacterial attributes, but also wonderful healing and mood-enhancing properties.

### How did it start?

My husband Paul and I started the business in 2017. It grew out of our preference for using natural remedies and solutions as part of our household routines and lifestyle. We looked for safe, non-toxic household cleaning products, but we couldn't find what we wanted, so we decided to start a company to make our own.

### What's it like running a business and being a parent?

It's both really hard and really rewarding. If parenthood is the most challenging and exhilarating experience possible—and I think it is—then starting up, running, and growing your own business runs parenthood a close second! I honestly think that if we'd known all of the challenges we'd face and have to figure out, it probably would have stopped us in our tracks or at least given us many more sleepless nights, so I just feel so thankful we didn't know. It's a chaotic, crazy but beautiful journey sometimes.

### What have you learnt about yourself while running Koala Eco?

That it's a wonderful thing to be involved with something that's a personal passion as well as a means of making a meaningful livelihood. I developed an enduring curiosity and love for botanicals as a child. I'm also fortunate to live in a country where the healing power of plants and botanicals has been (and still is) understood and celebrated by Australia's First Nations people for many millennia. These native plants grow all over this amazing continent.

### What challenges have you overcome?

I don't know that I've really overcome the challenges of keeping all the balls in the air: making enough time for the kids, making enough time for the business, making enough time for Paul and I as a couple...but perhaps I've learned to be more accepting of the fact that it's good enough to be 'good enough.' We're all doing the best we can. I try to look at intimidating situations as an opportunity for personal growth. I also love the saying 'you can't be afraid to fail'. I truly believe that experiencing failure is what makes you grow, and without failure you plateau.



### What has been your proudest moment at Koala Eco?

It's difficult to pick one, because there are so many moments ... like when we launched our first product, or expanded into China and the US, or first saw Koala Eco on shelves in retail stores in Australia. But if I were to pick one it would be connected to our name: the Eco (and dot-eco website domain). We were one of the first businesses to be invited to re-badge as a dot-eco company by the Vancouver-based dot-eco movement, launched by two former United Nations Environment Programme staffers. We're really proud to be part of that.

### We love your 'Hour In Nature' concept, tell us more about that...

In 2021 we adopted a new practice at Koala Eco: having our team members spend an hour a week in nature as part of the work week, intentionally doing something connected to the natural world that feels particularly healing, and is not about routine things like exercise. They can do whatever they want, share the experience or photos with us, so that we can then share it with the wider Koala Eco community on social media. We also starting talking to well-known people around the world whom we believe genuinely live and breathe a nature-focused lifestyle because it brings healing, beauty, peace, and meaning to their lives. We ask them to share their 'hours in nature', so that they can inspire some of ours, too.

### **What inspired you to do the hour of nature?**

As Koala Eco has grown as a company, and our products have continued to receive such a great reception, we've also been thinking deeply—as individuals and within the Koala Eco team—about what being in or close to nature means for us in our daily lives. And we've all agreed there's no doubt that that connection to nature makes us feel so much better in a variety of ways.

### **What has this process taught you?**

That Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden; or a Life in the Woods* got it absolutely right when he wrote 'We need the tonic of wildness...we can never have enough of nature.' Of course, this is something that the First Nations peoples of the world have always lived and understood. Immersion in nature is a deeply spiritual, enriching and sustaining experience. And it's a reciprocal thing: if we care for nature, nature cares for us.

### **What kind of work culture do you aim to create?**

An open, trusting, creative and collaborative one, I hope, where everyone can make a contribution. Incidentally, we are fortunate to have some incredibly talented women on the Koala Eco team. Most of them are in the online business space, and all of them invest such intelligence and commitment into their work with us. One of the most meaningful things we share is our ability to support and encourage one another. This ability is based on a deep mutual respect, and a genuine desire to see every one of us succeed.

### **Why do you love what you do?**

The business is all about the things I believe in, and would be practising anyway: care for the planet, healthy choices, getting out into nature. And I absolutely love the testing stage where we are working with the lab to formulate new products.

### **You're always working on new products - how important is that to you?**

Really important, and very exciting! While natural cleaning and body products remain the core of our collection, we're starting to focus on ideas that help people to connect with nature in other meaningful ways in the home. Products that support the creation of a restful environment, in places like the bedroom. We've developed a Natural Pillow and Linen Spray from the essential oils of nature's three best stress-relieving and anti-inflammatory botanicals: Eucalyptus, Peppermint, and the beautifully aromatic Australian bush lavender, Rosalina. We've intentionally taken Thoreau's Transcendentalist message to heart in developing our ideas in this direction for Koala Eco. Our aspiration is to develop more products of this kind, to enhance healthy and pleasurable nature-based practices in people's daily domestic lives.

### **What is your favourite product and why?**

Probably the first one we launched, because so much was riding on it! This was our Natural Multipurpose Kitchen Cleaner with Lemon Myrtle and Mandarin. We worked so hard with our chemists and labs to make a real winner to launch our company, and it's been one of our top sellers ever since.

Lemon Myrtle [*Backhousia citriodora*] has fresh, evergreen, lemony notes, and is really effective at deodorizing and removing bacteria while acting as a natural mood booster. Mandarin [*Citrus reticulata*] is nature's perfect pick-me-up, its scent promoting happiness, contentment and calm. But it also has fabulous antibacterial, antimicrobial, antifungal, and antiviral properties as well, which when combined with other essential oils, make it a truly powerful cleaner.

We wanted to start with a product that could do everything, and I find I use this everywhere: the fridge, bench tops, kids' lunchboxes, wherever.

**What advice - business and personal - would you give to your 20-year-old self?**

I think it's the same for both business and personal.

Listen. Learn from people who are doing things you admire. Try not to take no for an answer, but accept that some things are not meant for you, and let go of them gracefully. Begin to build belief in yourself because it will be a lifetime's work, and if you can value and back yourself, it will help you make good, lasting relationships with other people. And make sure you never run out of coffee beans and chocolate.

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