

The Breeder Diaries:



MANDALA SEEDS' JASMIN

WORDS JOHNNY VEE
PICS MANDALA SEEDS

Consumers love choice. Walk into any mega store and whether it's salad dressing or dog food you'll be bombarded by enough selection to make you buzz without ever lighting up that Haze. The same is true in the world of cannabis seeds, where industrious breeders are always trying to create or improve upon the next big thing.

To some companies this means simply tweaking an old favorite or worse, smacking a new label on someone else's hard work. For a select few it means a delicate balancing act between creating killer genetics at an affordable price, all while respecting the environment that gives up its prized bounty. No one better exemplifies this ideal than Jasmin from Mandala Seeds, an innovative company that has rapidly become the connoisseur pick anywhere their gear is offered. When it came to selecting a woman for this installment of the Breeder Diaries there was simply no choice.



MIKE AND YOURSELF FOUNDED MANDALA IN WHAT CAN BE DESCRIBED AS AN ALMOST MYSTICAL UNION OF TWO KINDRED SPIRITS. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ORIGINS OF MANDALA. We teamed up in India in the late 1980's while I was working there in an agricultural development project. Mike had already spent years travelling the world and was a keen collector of landrace cannabis seeds. My entry into horticulture was after I completed studies in biology, botany and bee keeping. I had also experimented with several eastern spiritual and philosophical schools, even living a year in a strictly no-drugs ashram to become a medita-

tion teacher. But somehow my destiny became mysteriously entwined with cannabis. Both of us shared many common interests so it was natural to just keep doing what we loved best, which was exploring the outer and inner world with sacred plants. Since we travelled throughout even the remotest regions of India for 3 years a substantial seed depot began to develop. A lot of people come to India searching for the ultimate high – and there is no place like India that has experimented with just about any technique to free your mind. After sharing the chillum with many travelers again and again along the famous Goa-Manali route it dawned on us that we could establish a professional breeding project and share our collection. I had already gained a lot of experience by cultivating a big plot of local herb in the Himalayan foothills without any of the modern day props. It was no-frills gardening; the soil was fertilized with dung, the water came from the sky or was channeled from a nearby stream. In a Shiva temple the seeds from each harvest were blessed by a local priest in a consecrated mandala. From this special and auspicious event we later derived the name of our seed bank.

MANY COUPLES I KNOW COULDN'T EVEN IMAGINE WORKING TOGETHER. HOW DOES BEING A COUPLE AFFECT YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIP? I can't imagine working without Mike! It's a blessing, and, quite frankly, also an absolute necessity that we work together – in harmony of course. Without the dedication, support, and trust in our relationship it would be impossible to manage the incredible challenges we face every day.

MANDALA STRAINS ARE RECOGNIZED NOT ONLY FOR QUALITY BUT ALSO FOR BEING VERY AFFORDABLE. IS LOW PRICING PART OF YOUR COMPANY PHILOSOPHY?

There should be a balance between what you give and what you take. The vast majority of growers are not wealthy. It is an essential part of our philosophy that everyone should be able to afford the best possible herb that nature can offer. That is why we manage the company in such a way to make that dream come true. We keep expenses and personal desires at a reasonable level to share the surplus with our customers through great prices. An important factor is also our complete confidence in the quality of our genetics. I know that we can afford to make cutbacks on things like marketing because the Mandala plants are going to satisfy our customers. Six years ago we stunned the seed industry with our ethics, price policy and strict quality control. We were the only seed bank to offer unique genetics around 20\$ that matched, or even outperformed, the most sought after connoisseur strains. There has been a significant change since Mandala Seeds was started in the way the cannabis community views

price-quality ratio. Growers also now understand that there are many things affecting how seeds are priced – most of them, like aggressive marketing or outsourcing, are not even connected to product quality.

YOUR STRAINS CONTAIN LANDRACE GENETICS, ESPECIALLY FROM INDIA. TRAVELLING MUST TAKE A LOT OF YOUR TIME. HOW EASY IS IT TO BALANCE RUNNING A SEED COMPANY WITH THE SEARCH FOR THESE ELUSIVE STRAINS? When we go strain hunting the business is temporarily closed. Because of our experience and meticulous planning we have the benefit of being able to get the most out of a relatively short travel time. Our last adventure took us to three countries in two months. It was highly successful and we hope to share an exciting new range of genetics from this collection in the near future.

WHY IS BREEDING WITH LANDRACE STRAINS SO IMPORTANT TO YOU? Biodiversity is the driving force of evolution. Look at how many life forms have developed on our planet. Every landrace strain carries the entire history of its evolutionary wisdom within it. It's a genetic goldmine. Mike and I both started out by growing only plants from the wild, or interesting landrace hybrids from private sources. It was totally natural to us. Later in Europe we came into contact with commercial genetics. That's when we began noticing big differences between many commercial hybrids and quality landrace strains. What struck me were such things like lack of vigor, poor stress resistance, and almost chronic fertilizer dependency...like you needed some kind of intravenous drip-feeding. Whichever plant species humanity depends



■ Krystalica.

on, the heirloom or landrace genetics are the key to preserving many essential traits lost in commercial interests. It's therefore important to preserve landraces. But none of the current international gene vaults have included this valuable medicinal herb, despite its obvious importance to millions of people worldwide. To make matters worse, since the mid 1990's there is an alarming trend towards weak cannabis genetics due to low standards and lack of professionalism in the seed industry. If the same genetics are simply re-hashed over and over again you lose essential positive traits such as high yield, resistance, adaptability, vigor, and extraordinary cannabinoid profiles. We strive to resist this trend and create unique cannabis hybrids

or heirloom crosses. That is why our strains are the #1 choice for growers requiring long-lasting mother plants, stress resistant genetics, and fast growth, just to name a few. For example, growers who start their crop indoors and move it outdoors are impressed by the way our strains handle the light stress. Our outdoor strains for the north like Mandala #1 and 8 Miles High were meticulously bred with such goals in mind. Hashberry is legendary for being a "hard to kill" plant. This is especially appreciated by newbies. Just about any Mandala strain contains impressive traits, which make it stand out from the crowd.

HOW MUCH TIME USUALLY GOES INTO RELEASING A NEW MANDALA VARIETY? It differs quite a bit and can take many years. Mandala #1 is an example of a long-term project. We aimed to create a strain nobody had so far offered commercially: a reliable, early plant for the north with big yield and a sativa high. Some varieties are less time intensive because they also profit from previous projects, but going through the selective breeding and testing phases still lasts 2 years and longer.

MANY OF YOUR STRAINS CONTAIN SATIVAS. I ASSUME YOU ARE A SATIVA FAN. WHAT IS YOUR PARTICULAR FAVORITE? Beyond the Brain and Satori.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE GROWING METHOD? Common sense. And I enjoy organic gardening with home-made compost...

POTENCY, YIELD, FLAVOR AND AROMA SEEM TO BE THE MOST DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES WHEN YOU ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW VARIETIES YET YOU ARE

ALSO KNOWN AS A COMPANY THAT STRIVES TO SOLVE COMMON PROBLEMS SUCH AS MOLD RESISTANCE. HOW DO YOU DO THIS? A zero-tolerance approach for weaknesses is important to start with. That's

why we have intensive selection processes and make many crosses at once to eventually find the best match. Over the years our observations showed that cannabis responds to environmental conditioning and plant response can be passed on to future generations. This is how we basically embed traits like heat resistance, nutrient uptake efficiency and so on. Throughout all processes of selection, breeding, and seed production the plants have to also withstand harsh conditions and show that they can perform well and stay in good health.

TELL OUR READERS A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR UNIQUE DELUXE SEEDS PROGRAM.

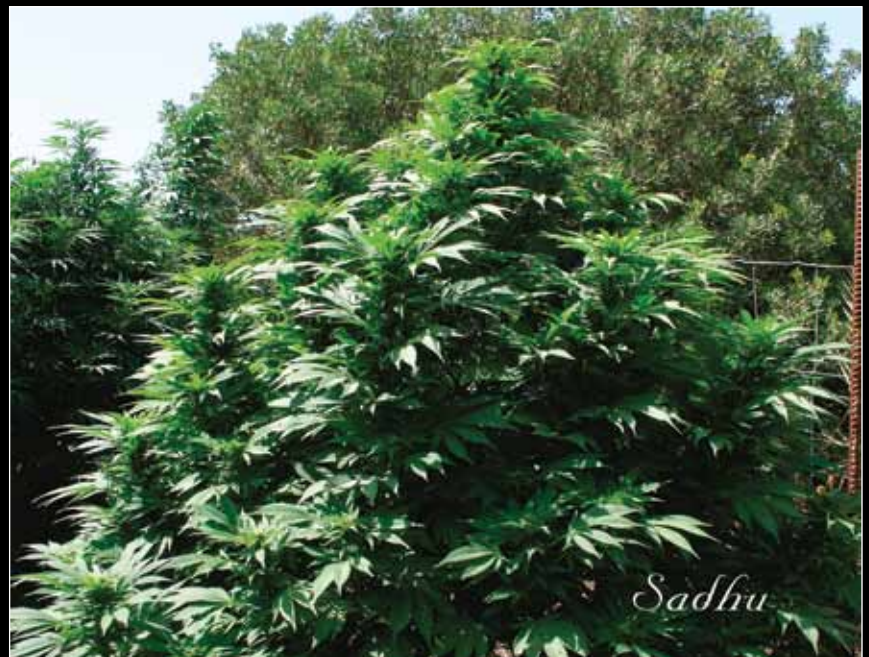
There used to be this old school idea to pollinate just one calyx on a female and grow the ultimate seed, which would yield a godlike plant. We chose the next best thing, seed quality is of primary importance but rarely taken into account in commercial production. Our production centers around an artisan-like approach. It's all carefully planned and carried out. Such as manual pollination... not just a male being hit by a fan and pollen flying all over the place. Mother plants are also grown as large as possible and pollinated at an optimal stage in flowering. This does not give

you maximum seed production but maximum quality. Great care is also taken in ensuring optimal ripeness of seed crops. The harvest is then processed manually - this is time intensive but results in beautifully mottled seeds. The most extensive and expensive part is that we test every single pollinated plant for optimal germination and seedling health. Seeds are then carefully hand-picked in the final phase for packaging. We sacrifice thousands of viable seeds each year, and throw away every batch that does not meet our standards.

IT'S BEEN AWHILE SINCE WE'VE HAD YOU IN SKUNK. WHAT ARE YOUR NEWEST OFFERINGS?

The Dream-time Collection has been initiated by our new indica Point of No Return. It's an exceptional medical-grade indica with a good yield. The knock-out stone is going to be appreciated by everyone who wants to wind down and orbit in deep space for the rest of the evening. PNR has great potential for pain relief, as a muscle relaxant and sleep aid. Many Mandala growers are medical users or part of compassion clubs and we realized the necessity of expanding in this direction.

Also the beta version of Beyond the Brain has lifted off. A high-flying sativa that's unusually discreet to grow, so she is perfect even for a homebox. With 23-25% THC this Mandala strain is now serious competition for our Satori. And our new limited edition of Krystalica is finally there. So many people e-mailed us over the years requesting Krystalica that we can truly say she is back by popular demand.



Outdoor Sadhu.

ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON ANY NEW STRAINS TO AD TO YOUR STABLE? Our head is always spinning in many directions. There are numerous ongoing projects and in 2011 the Mandala catalogue is going to expand considerably.

FEMINIZED SEEDS AND AUTO FLOWERERS SEEM TO BE TAKING OVER THE CANNABIS INDUSTRY WITH EVERY BREEDER JUMPING ON THE BANDWAGON. THIS DOES NOT SEEM TO FIT INTO YOUR BREEDING PHILOSOPHY. DO YOU THINK THIS WILL EVER CHANGE? As someone concerned about the future of cannabis genetics I view feminized seeds with mixed feelings. I see the necessity when medical growers are allowed to grow only 3-4 plants at a time. But from a botanical perspective feminization is a genetic dead end. There is a reason why evolution favors dual sex. It is scientifically proven that male-female reproduction leads to a more robust immune and stress response. If a gene pool is polluted by hermaphroditic tendencies and weak hybrids it will eventually backfire. Since the early 1970s the backbone of cannabis breeding has come from the creative efforts of serious hobbyists. Some of these people turn professional, but many don't, even if they share their work with others. If quality regular seeds continue to decline the entire basis of this grassroots movement is endangered. That's why it is essential that a balance is maintained - but it depends entirely on what seeds growers spend their money on. As a seed bank we do not always have the luxury of following our own path and have to adapt to what is in demand. We try to balance it out and remain true to our cause. Our first feminized seed project already lies back 10 years. This seed stock was purely for our breeding purposes. About 2 ½ years ago we sold a limited edition of a feminized Mandala #1 and it was a complete success. Since then we have been working on further feminized strains and hope to introduce them in 2011.

With regards to autoflowering, growers who buy Mandala strains are not looking for low potency or low yield. I am also having doubts as to any advantages of growing autoflowering seeds indoor when you can just take any of our indicas and start them under 12/12. That gives you better results within a similar time frame. The only project that I am interested in spending my time on is for a robust auto-outdoor variety. That makes sense to me and there are very few offerings on the market in this direction.

IN NORTH AMERICA WE HAVE A VERY SHORT SEASON. WHAT ARE YOUR FASTEST FINISHERS? Mandala #1 and 8 Miles High are the top choices for outdoor in the north. One of the best compli-



■ Satori.

ments we ever heard came from a Canadian lady who said that she had never seen a strain perform so well in her area despite numerous attempts with homebred Canadian genetics. Mandala #1 has also been successfully grown as far north as 60°N in Finland.

DO YOU THINK THE FACT THAT YOU ARE A WOMAN CHANGES THE WAY THAT COLLEAGUES APPROACH BUSINESS WITH YOU? Rarely. I also choose carefully whom I do business with.

WHY DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SO FEW WOMEN IN THIS INDUSTRY? There are quite a number of women in cannabusiness but they are not in charge. I deal with several women on a daily basis and all are working for a male boss. It's a common situation you find in any business. Among the top 500 companies in the U.S. only a dozen CEO's are women. This percentage reflects a worldwide trend.

YOU ARE A BIG PROPONENT OF PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO FOLLOW SUIT. HOW DO YOU IMPLEMENT METHODS THAT ARE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY INTO YOUR BREEDING PROJECTS?

We came up with a new concept, which we call "energy saving genetics". These are cannabis strains which grow fast and reduce veg. time, do well under low-light, require little or no extra feeding, have great water retention capability, high pest resistance, and so on.

About 70% of our seed bank projects are powered by the sun, which greatly reduces negative power consumption. We recycle soil, use organic fertilizer like worm manure, and make a lot of home-made compost. It's also important to me to use biological pesticides that are bee-friendly.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS GROWERS CAN FOLLOW YOUR EXAMPLE? I urge you to look at the country of origin when you buy cultivation supplies or just about anything you buy for yourself and your family. Make an effort to avoid products made in China. China and the shipping industry is a huge polluter of our planet. Supplies are shipped there, assembled or fabricated in coal-fueled factories, then shipped back to the west. Secondly, they have the worst form of capitalism with people living and working in slave-like conditions for extremely low pay. Buy local products and support your own economy. Another significant step is to ignore the brainwashing from the agro-chemical industry. Especially phosphate and potash mining are harmful industries so don't use PK 13-14 products or "bud boosters". Switch to green energy whenever possible, support companies that are considerate about the environment. Use your buying power as a consumer to make a difference. This is what the industry fears most!

Where you put your money changes the way business is done. Join an environmental group that takes action about things you care. Go to greenpeace.org for many great ideas on what you can do.

IF THE TREND TOWARD LEGALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES CONTINUES WILL WE SEE MANDALA SEEDS IN NORTH AMERICA? Let's wait and see.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS YOUR GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE CANNABIS INDUSTRY? A change in consciousness.

FINALLY, A SELFISH QUESTION, WHEN CAN WE SEE YOU CONTRIBUTING TO SKUNK? Haven't I just done so? ;-)