

‘It feels right that my job is connected to nature’

Ruth Ridley, 46, from Seaford, East Sussex, turned a love of horticulture into a sweet-smelling career.

‘**E**ach morning, when I walk into my workshop, I’m greeted by a heady combination of scents: Provençal lavender, rose petals and camomile. These intoxicating fragrances never fail to put a smile on my face.

I studied chemistry at university before getting a PhD, and always assumed I’d work in a lab. But while studying for my PhD, I discovered a passion for gardening. My husband Mike, 46, and I were living in a garden flat in London, and tending to my plants and flowers provided a therapeutic distraction from my studies.

So when we moved to Sussex for Mike’s job as an accountant, I decided to begin a career in horticulture. I got a job at a garden centre and worked my way up to manager. Living on the coast, with country walks on my doorstep, it felt right that my job was connected to nature.

With two young children at the time – Rowan, now 16, and Hazel, 14 – I wanted more control over my working hours. My job at the garden centre had taught me that there was a demand for dried-flower products, such as pot pourri, but there weren’t many UK stockists. I’d found a gap in the market.

In 2003, I launched Daisy Shop. It was an online store, which made more sense than having a high-street shop – there was no rent and I could work from home. I designed my website using a free design package and marketed the business via Google AdWords’ pay-per-click advertising. I used our savings to fund start-up costs of around £2,000, which covered stock

RUTH’S BUSINESS TIPS

- Listen to your customers. Their feedback is invaluable when growing your business.
- Don’t be afraid of selling online. If you’re not web-savvy, there are lots of free courses available to help you.
- Stay ahead of trends by reading blogs, magazines and networking with others in your industry.

suppliers in the UK and Provence. But when a bride-to-be asked me to provide dried rose petals for confetti, I began to expand my dried-flower range, and now I create my own products, such as lavender bags and bouquets.

A kilo of French dried lavender costs £10, and a bundle of popular dried flowers, such as delphiniums, is £7.99. People are being more economical these days and

and packaging. We turned one of our bedrooms into a storeroom and I worked from the kitchen table.

At first, I stocked just a few products, including pot pourri and dried lavender, which I sourced from

buying fewer fresh flowers, leading to a surge in the popularity of the dried variety, which last longer. They are also getting more creative, using dried flowers to make table decorations and Christmas wreaths.

In 2008, I moved to a workshop and took on a part-time employee. We were doing so well that Mike decided to leave his job to join the company. Now he takes care of the accounts, while I focus on the products. We’re doing well enough to pay three sets of wages and turn a profit, too.

My customers include The National Trust, which sells my lavender bags in some of its gift shops, while our rose petals will soon be appearing in the film *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*.

To work in such a creative business with such wonderful, natural products is so much more satisfying than being in a lab!’

● daisyshop.co.uk

