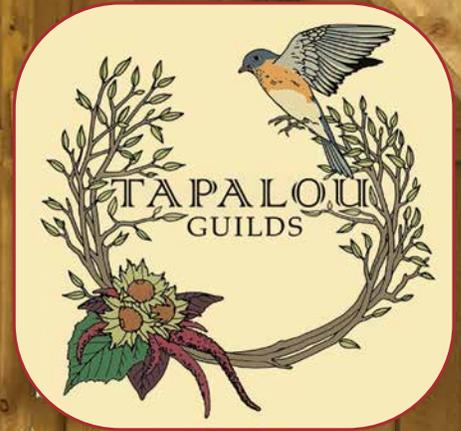


Tapalou Guilds



Producer OF THE *Month*

JUNE 2020



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE *Month*

by Jon Megas-Russell



Hanna Jenkins' spiritual connection to flowers originates from her experiences with the bookends of life. Through the birth of her son and the death of her mom, flowers accompanied her with comfort, solace, levity and inspiration. The establishment of Tapalou Guilds, her family's farm, gave her the chance to truly understand that flowers can provide deep support and how important it was for her to try and spread that joy through her work. As their website states, "Tapalou Guilds is a family-owned and -operated, mission-driven flower farm in Guilford, VT. Our mission strives to evoke connection, healing, celebration and awareness, through flowers."

Hanna grows approximately an acre of cut flowers. She grows flowers for community members, co-ops, donations, CSA, funerals, weddings, and other events. She came into the world of farming via nonprofit work in the area of increasing access to local food for people of all incomes. She brought with her a deep-rooted commitment to expanding access to flowers for a diverse population of people. In our society, specialty cut flowers are luxury goods and are typically priced out of many people's limited budgets, which is a very real barrier. This observation prompted the birth of "Blooms for Beings," a new initiative where volunteers commit to work on the farm to cultivate and harvest flowers that will be donated to organizations

such as the Women's Freedom Center, Brattleboro Area Hospice and Turning Point. This allows flowers to bring joy to those community members that may not otherwise have access. In addition, in an effort to make flowers more affordable and accessible, she offers a sliding scale within her CSA.

At the root of Hanna's guiding principles around flowers is that they connect us to our relationships with ourselves, earth, spirit and others. She sees firsthand how these connections produce memories from customers bringing forward comments such as "my grandmother grew these," coupled with a strong emotional response. During these moments Hanna is reminded of how flowers are a bridge to family lineage,



and it brings her deep satisfaction. The connection with flowers can run even deeper, as many people are grieving on profound levels and flowers are able to contribute to feelings of solace, hope and purpose. As she stated, “Flowers companion us along our diverse journeys and serve as illuminators.”

Over and over Hanna asks herself, “How can I get more flowers to more people?” With that as one of her main goals she has slowly moved from a mainly vegetable farm just a few years ago to a flower farm with over 150 varieties. This focus on flowers started when she participated in an online course to learn more about small- to mid-scale flower production. Most recently, as a means of increasing access and connection through flowers, she started a Friend Share. Folks can join her CSA, purchase one share and have it split between two friends. This makes being part of a Flower CSA more affordable and provides two friends something to “share” through a time of increased isolation.

Again from the Tapalou website: “Flowers are the foundation of pollination, one of the earth’s most precious gifts.” Thus, on the farm Hanna focuses on ecologically sound and organic growing practices to provide a healthy ecosystem for



the flowers, bees, her family, and all other beings that utilize the land. They have a diverse variety of flowers, perennial food crops, and annual vegetables that grow on just a few acres on their land. Hoop houses are utilized to extend the growing season during both the spring and fall. Hanna operates the farm with help from her partner Andy, volunteers, and some part-time paid labor. She predominantly utilizes hand tools to work her soil and grow her flowers. She is working towards maximizing soil fertility and using regenerative growing practices. While tractor use is limited, she uses it to establish new permanent beds. She is heartened by the farm’s perpetual movement forward in maximizing soil health, efficiency and growth.

So why the name Tapalou Guilds? Hanna and her partner Andy started Tapalou Guilds in 2015. The farm’s name is from their pets’ names: Hanna’s dog Chispa was nicknamed “Tapfoot,” and Andy’s dog, Penny, was nicknamed “Lou.” They liked the ring of Tapalou and it seems fitting given the rhythm of farm life. Furthermore, a guild is an association of people for the pursuit of a common goal. It also refers to a group of plants that work in mutually beneficial ways. These definitions are at the heart of everything they do at their farm.

Hanna considers flowers to be her life and spiritual teachers as each season brings learning, reflection and growth that allows her to integrate and move forward. Furthermore,



she believes that “flowers awaken us to our lives and senses. Flowers are tangible totems of cyclical rhythms. For me, they hold the key to unlocking what I consider to be the nutrient dense morsels of living and dying.” She finds great fulfillment in growing and designing with flowers that come into people’s lives during times of great transition.

Hanna has woven flowers into her work to become an End of Life Doula. It has become evident to her that when people are close to dying they often have “visits” from loved ones who have already died. These visits are not born of confusion, but are just a part of the diverse experiences of the dying. It was through this understanding that Hanna realized she wanted to grow flowers for the dying and their caregivers. If someone can be having profound experiences of being “visited” by a deceased family member and simultaneously have access to the flowers that remind them of their ancestors,

a deep connection can be made. Hanna considers this the work of flowers, serving and companionsing us in a harmonious way.

With so much uncertainty it’s difficult to know what the future will look like, but the good news is that the Co-op will be a place where all can continue to purchase the flowers of Tapalou Guilds. It’s so important right now to support local producers such Tapalou Guilds and other farmers in the region. Our economy and communities will stay strong as long as we continue to focus on purchasing local products. This June, bring flowers into your house, drop them to a friend, or donate some to a local organization. Flowers bring joy, and there’s no better time to spread love than now. If you’d like more information about Tapalou Guilds please visit their website, TapalouGuilds.com. Hanna can be found on Instagram at [#tapaloupollinators](https://www.instagram.com/tapaloupollinators) and on Facebook. 

