

juice boost

A wheatgrass grower's journey to health // BY RHEA MAZE

➤ Straight out of college, George Phillips accepted a high-stress job on Wall Street. Although the money on the trading floor was good, the health of his colleagues was not, and he soon decided he wanted a different life for himself. Today Phillips is the owner of Grateful Greens, a Brentwood-based wheatgrass operation supplying the Bay Area and Northern California with organically grown wheatgrass.

Wheatgrass is one of a variety of wheat-like grasses in the *Poaceae* family that is widely promoted for its health benefits. Considered to be a "superfood," wheatgrass contains a high concentration of nutrients including chlorophyll, enzymes, amino acids, vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids.

"One ounce of wheatgrass contains more nutrients than a good-sized spinach salad," Phillips says.

After leaving Wall Street, Phillips worked in high-tech sales and traveled frequently. "I was on airplanes almost every day. To do that and still maintain your health, you have to be conscious of what you're eating."

While visiting a friend in Chicago, Phillips had his first taste of wheatgrass juice. He says he noticed an energizing effect almost immediately, although it was not the same kind of jolt you get from a cup of coffee. From that day on, he searched out wheatgrass everywhere he traveled.

In 2007, Phillips decided to leave the high-tech industry in order to pursue goals more in line with his personal values. "I've always been a believer in the value of nutrition and its connection to health," Phillips says.

He purchased Grateful Greens, a business that was already producing wheatgrass. Three longtime Grateful Greens employees stayed on with him. Today, the company produces certified organic, high-quality wheatgrass, plus sunflower and pea sprouts.

Wheatgrass has a pungent, grassy taste, which some people find bitter. Phillips says



Waiting in the green room: George Phillips at the Grateful Greens greenhouse

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to eliminate the bitterness, dilute the wheatgrass juice or add orange juice and a drop of vanilla extract to sweeten it. While experienced wheatgrassers can juice their own green elixir at home using a masticating juicer, novices should start with a one-ounce shot from their local juice bar, where it is often served with an orange slice chaser. Many Bay Area juice bars serve wheatgrass grown by Phillips' company.

"It's part art and part science to grow wheatgrass," Phillips says. It can be grown outside, but it is easier to control the quality and taste of the grass by growing it indoors. Direct sun can create excess heat, and wheatgrass does not need much light to thrive.


Each growing cycle begins with soaking hard, red, winter wheat seeds for 24 hours. The seeds are then planted in trays and carefully tended for 9 to 11 days before being shipped to stores. The water used to grow the wheatgrass drains into a retention pond and goes back into the aquifer. Extra organic matter is composted, and excess wheatgrass is fed to the neighbor's horses. Grateful Greens is also working towards using solar energy to power the fans and control the temperature in its facility.

Phillips says that many people regularly drink wheatgrass juice as part of a detoxifying or healing regimen. "Wheatgrass can help mitigate the effects of some of the compromising we do in our diets and what we are exposed to," he says.

That's why Phillips usually takes two ounces each morning and afternoon. "It's the sun's energy, a life force," he says. "The benefits are extreme." ■

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