

TOP FIVE

Spring never smelled this good!



► Cats in the Cradle, Alton

Cats in the Cradle is a soap-making company based in Alton. The name references the reason for the company's existence – owner Chris Whittmann's farmhouse and old barn was becoming a refuge for stray cats. At one point, she was harboring 32 strays in need of food and medical care. So, in 1991, she sold her first batch of soap to support the kitties. Today, the farm is down to a more manageable five cats.

Chris's soaps are cured for two to three weeks and are great for sensitive skin. Each bar is wrapped in packaging with original artwork and photos or images from Chris's collection of vintage books. If you happen to be in Alton, you might be able to stop by the Cats in the Cradle mudroom shop. You'll find soap, skin care products, old books and other vintage finds and potted herbs grown on the premises. It's best to call ahead to make sure someone will be home. You can also order soap online. Visit catsinthecradlesoap.com or call 875-7284. The farm is located at 122 Frank C. Gilman Highway, Alton.



Our testers said the bug bar soap was the best smelling repellent they've ever seen! The Devon Violet soap had a pleasant scent to match the pretty packaging. A real baby tested the Goatmilk Baby soap – mom reports back: "My 3-month-old's skin and hair felt soft after the tub, and he smelled fantastic. My 4-year-old will like it for the sculpting she'll be able to do with the thick side." Soaps start at \$4.95.

By Katie MacKenzie

Spring in New Hampshire often means rain, mud and cloudy days, but thanks to these five companies, you can enjoy the scents of the season no matter what the weather is like.

We tried a few products from each company and were impressed by the offerings. From lilac to pink grapefruit, there's a scent for everyone. And this isn't just for the ladies – our male testers enjoyed the products just much!

Make the next overcast day your excuse to do a little pampering. It's a good reminder that warm, sunny days are just around the corner.

► StoLat Organics, Newmarket

StoLat Organics derives its name from a Polish wish of wellness and prosperity. Literally translated, it means, "May you live a hundred years." Owner Amy Gendreau is sending those good wishes to her customers after experiencing the benefit of natural, organic products herself. She and her children have very sensitive skin, so she worked with a dermatologist and naturopath to create soothing body products to use at home. Friends of the family tried the products, and pretty soon Amy was creating batches to give as gifts. It wasn't long before her homemade goods were being shipped across the United States and Europe. "At that point," Amy says, "I decided to dig in my heels and make an official business."

Amy's engineering background proved helpful in development and testing and, combined with an interest in organic body care, made for a "unique blending of two things [she's] passionate about." Her reward is the comments from customers who attest to the difference natural products made for them.

At the StoLat Organics website, stolatorganics.com, you'll find shea butter lotion, soap, body and linen mist, lip shimmer, gift sets and more. Products can also be found at local shops, including Jewell and the Beanstalk, Manchester; Durham Market Place; and Bedford Fields Garden Center and Home Décor.



The hydrating body oil (\$14.50) in pink grapefruit was a hit with our tester: "I slathered this on post-shower and the smell was so perky I almost skipped coffee. And the oil has done wonders for my skin. Unlike other bath oils, this product isn't sticky or greasy, so I was able to get dressed right away."

► W.S. Badger Co., Gilsun

About 8 miles outside of Keene is the tiny town of Gilsun, population 800. It's home to the family-owned W.S. Badger Co., purveyor of natural body products sporting the oh-so-adorable badger label. The company got its start in 1995 in the kitchen of Bill Whyte, a carpenter and hobby herbalist. He suffered from dry, cracked hands in the winter and couldn't find a good moisturizing product, so he made his own (now sold as Badger Healing Balm). Today, about 40 people are employed at company headquarters, also known as "The Badger Mines." In addition to a line of soothing balms, there are lip-care products, sunscreen and after-sun care creams, soaps, body butters and massage oils. All products contain at least 70 percent certified organic ingredients.

Visit badgerbalm.com to request a catalog, view store locations or order products online.



Our tester thought the rose body butter (\$10) would be perfect to use before bed. The cheerful mind balm (\$8) "definitely took the sting out of my over-washed skin, and the smell – oranges and spearmint – is a happy one," wrote our tester. One tester liked the convenient size of the cuticle care (\$5.50): "The cute little tin fits in my purse, and the luscious balm has made my fingertips ready for spring."

► Jenness Farm, Nottingham

Like goats? Peter and Lori Corriveau do, and they've built a business around a herd of happy, spoiled ones. On the company website, Lori writes, "They get fresh sheets (clean shavings) every week, new sneakers (trimmed hooves) on a regular basis, cookies after each meal (alfalfa cube pieces) and plenty of human interaction." All of Jenness Farm's 90-plus product offerings are made in an old farmhouse kitchen using manpower and a stick blender. Only goat milk from the farm makes it into the products.

Goat's milk products are said to work well for people with allergies, psoriasis, eczema and other sensitive skin complaints. The magic is in the milk – it's gentle because of similar pH levels to human skin. Science also tells us that goat's milk (unlike cows) is already homogenized in its original form, which helps with absorption. Furry, adorable and good for you? It would seem goats have long been underrated.

To get your hands on some of Jenness Farm's soap, moisturizers, lip balms, room and linen spray and other products, visit jennessfarm.com. There is also a retail store at the farm where you can get in some quality time with the goats. The shop is open Wednesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. It's located at 77 Garland Road, Nottingham. Call 942-8051 or visit the website for more information.



Our tester said the goat milk body lotion (\$6) "is creamy and intense. An added surprise: the lily of the valley scent has a chocolatey background smell!" The room spray (\$6) "has a calming, clean, fresh smell, and one spray brightened my work space without being overkill." One tester was a fan of the New Hampshire lilac-scented soap (\$4). She writes, "this soap smelled just like a fragrant lilac bush without being overpowering. Plus, it left my skin feeling super soft afterward."

► Just Naturals & Co., Amherst

Karen Girardo, a 20-year veteran of the corporate world, founded Just Naturals & Co. in response to health issues she was experiencing. The toxins and chemicals found in traditional cleaning products only created more problems, she says. Six holistic practitioners and two years later, she was finally on the mend. The experience inspired Karen to impart her knowledge on the toxins found in our homes and provide a line of safe and affordable products. The result of her efforts is Just Naturals & Co., a bright and cheery shop at Salzberg Square in Amherst.

The shop offers cleaning, home, bath, aromatherapy and laundry products – pretty much anything you could use for your home or yourself. Many products are available in a wide variety of scents and, thanks to the use of essential oils, have therapeutic benefits.

The shop is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Tuesday 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Thursday 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; and Sunday noon-4 p.m. There is an online shop as well. Visit just-naturalproducts.com or call 672-6900 for more information.



The foaming hands soap (\$7) "lathers nicely and your hands feel clean after use," says our tester. "I especially like the look of the product as well as the amount that comes out of each pump." The mini lemongrass reed diffuser (\$15) left our cubicle smelling fresh and inviting. The rosemary mint all-purpose cleaner (\$9) cleaned one tester's counters nicely while the microfiber cloth (\$5) picked up stuck-on grime with less scrubbing. Even better, it lasts for 300 washes.