These Gardening Tools Are Made Just for Women—and No, They're Not Pink
Ann Adams and Liz Brensinger are being honored by In Her Company, a campaign celebrating the power, creativity, and impact of 30 inspiring women entrepreneurs.

Presented by EILEEN FISHER

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When former nurse Ann Adams and former health educator Liz Brensinger discovered the glaring absence of outdoor tools built to work well for women, they knew they had to act. In 2008, they created Green Heron Tools to help right what felt like a wrong—letting a traditionally male-dominated industry exclude women by design.

Green Heron Tools
www.greenherontools.com
Industry: Farm and garden tools
Founded: 2008

Our mission is to provide high-quality agricultural and gardening tools and equipment designed to work with women’s bodies, thereby maximizing comfort, efficiency, productivity, and safety.

TakePart: How did you come up with the idea for your business? Was there a turning point that convinced you to start your own business?

Ann Adams and Liz Brensinger: It was synergy between our personal passions for gardening and small-scale farming, our professional experiences, and our philosophies related to social justice and making a positive difference in the world. As longtime organic vegetable growers, we knew firsthand about the deficits of the tools available for women. As former public health professionals we also knew about the connections between poorly fitting tools and health and safety. And we’d spent years helping public and nonprofit organizations identify community needs and design programs to address them.
TakePart: What excites or inspires you? What do you care about?

Adams and Brenger: People, the health of people, other species, the soil, the land, the planet, righting wrongs. A lot of what we’re doing is meant to support women in doing what they love longer. It’s like creating a circle of health; doing what you love promotes health, and doing what you love longer may help you live longer and with a greater quality of life.

TakePart: Do you see any common challenges among female business owners and entrepreneurs?

Adams and Brenger: Women tend to see the world differently—we have more connections between the right and left hemispheres of our brains, for example, which affects how we see and experience the world. American business has been dominated by men, and the traditional business model values fast growth and profits over anything else. That model also says that to raise capital, you have to be prepared to sell your business or go public in three to five years so investors can get their money back. If you’re not willing to do that, your business is disparagingly called a “lifestyle company,” and lots of people basically write you off.
TakePart: What’s been the proudest moment that made you feel like your hard work was worth it?

Adams and Brensinger: Every time we hear from someone who says her life is easier because of our shovel! We also get a lot of positive feedback from women and men when we do shows and events, and that helps make it all worthwhile.

TakePart: What’s the best mistake you ever made?

Adams and Brensinger: An engineer on our shovel design team violated his confidentiality agreement by going to a large manufacturer with our ideas. He thought he was helping us, but that company ended up patenting what was really our blade, and as a tiny company there was really nothing we could do about it. What we have done is everything we could think of to “make lemonade”—developed a partnership with them to manufacture the blade—and we patented our large D grip and trademarked both the logo and the term “ergonomic.” Maybe the best lesson is that you can survive almost anything. And we do have a great blade!
**TakePart:** Why is sustainability important to you? How do you incorporate sustainability into your product and business practice?

**Adams and Brensinger:** Since starting Green Heron Tools we’ve discovered just how difficult decision making around sustainability can be. There are few blacks and whites and lots of grays—few simple issues and lots of complex ones. Some of the major ways we incorporate sustainability are, having our shovel sourced and made in the U.S.; making and selling only products that are high-quality and made to last; incorporating sustainable elements into manufacture; and minimizing and reusing packaging.

On a different level, the way we relate to customers—with honesty, integrity, and respect and also as personally as we can—is all about building a sustainable business that will not only survive but thrive over the long haul.