

Interview with Cannabis Grower, Anonymous

CB: Correct me if I'm wrong: You live in Northern California and you grow medical marijuana for the cannabis dispensaries, is that right?

Ms. X: Actually, I just grow it for personal use and for other patients' use; I don't actually sell it to a dispensary.

CB: Okay, so how did you get started growing cannabis?

Ms. X: Well, I've smoked cannabis for years, but when they made it legal to grow it in California, I moved here, because I had medicinal reasons to use it, and I thought, what better place to go than California and grow some weed? So I came out here, and I went to the college to get a horticulture degree. I was going to grow strawberries too. When I got out here, I met somebody who had a real need for medical marijuana, and he helped get me started. My first grow was in a closet. A friend of mine came over and he brought a light and a plant, and he showed me how to make clones. After that, I grew outside. One branch of an outdoor plant is the size of a whole indoor plant. So once I grew one of those outdoor plants, I could never grow indoors again, partly because it felt like I was wasting electricity to grow inside.

CB: You said that you had met someone who had a medical need for cannabis. What was his diagnosis?

Ms. X: He was hit by a drunk driver and paralyzed. So he uses it for relaxing his muscle spasms and to treat any pain he has. He doesn't take any other kind of pills.

And I actually have three torn discs in my lower back. So I was taking oxycontin and all kinds of pain medications. When the doctors tested me to make sure I wasn't using any other kinds of medication, they found out I was using marijuana. They said, "You can't use marijuana and take opiates." So I said, "Then I'm not going to take any more opiates." They stopped writing me prescriptions, and I just use marijuana now.

CB: And that's enough for your pain control?

Ms. X: I have to use it in different ways, like I have to eat it, and I have to make tinctures with it. It still doesn't stop a migraine; there are some times when I still need breakthrough medication to create a catalyst to stop the pain.

CB: So how do you make a tincture?

Ms. X: You can make it with alcohol, like vodka, or gin, or rum. You put the cannabis in a jar with it and depending on how strong you want it, you can do it for a month. The crystals break off, the alcohol actually breaks it down and then you strain it out after 30 days. Some people can't tolerate an alcohol tincture, so then they would use a glycerin tincture, which is nice in tea, and you can use it in cooking. You can just put a couple of drops in somebody's oatmeal in the morning if they're having trouble eating. You can just get a couple bites of something into them, and that will increase their appetite. For instance with HIV, it just makes all the difference in the world whether or not they're going to eat. If they can just get those couple of swallows down with some tincture in it, it will get their bellies hungry.

CB: That's important to know. You don't have to smoke cannabis to reap its medicinal benefits. Now, I understand you mostly grow Sativa at this point? Or is that not necessarily true?

Ms. X: Well, it seems like it, because that's what takes forever! Sativa takes 6 months to grow, and the other stuff only takes half as long. In the climate I'm in, I'm able to grow until December. There's a lot of sativa that won't mature outdoors until it gets to be December. Most people, like on the coast or in rainy areas, they can't grow outdoors that late in the year. Where I'm at, in the central desert, I'm able to grow into November and December.

CB: I understand Sativa naturally grows in Mexico and Thailand, and Indica grows well in Afghanistan, so what you're saying is that the climate that you're in, because it's more desert -like, it's good for growing Sativa?

Ms. X: Right.

CB: What's your take on the differences between Indica and Sativa, especially in terms of the patients that you deal with and what they prefer? Are there people that prefer different strains for their clinical needs?

Ms. X: Yeah, that's exactly what it is. Some people are just depressed; they don't want to get off their couch and do anything. So they need a Sativa, something that's going to unlock their creativity and give them energy. They'll take two hits, and before they even realize what they're doing, they're out cleaning their yard or something. All of a sudden they're excited about something and they have this energy. You only take like two or three hits, and it's very psychoactive. Now with Indica, when you're in a lot of pain and you need to relax, or you can't eat and your stomach's upset, you take the Indica and it just like lays you back and your body actually relaxes.

Now growers are breeding all these hybrids, and there are 50-50's and 40-60's, and then you have to decide which strain works for you. It's not always easy, when you're down on the corner buying your bag. You don't know what you're going to get. But for medical patients, I think it's come a long way. You can go to the dispensary and say, "I need something for my headaches," or "I need something that will help me eat." And the dispensary can make specific recommendations, certain strains that are better at relieving those symptoms.

CB: So in general, I understand that Sativas are more activating and more cerebral, and it doesn't make you sleepy or lazy. And you're saying that Indicas will usually make you hungrier than the Sativas do?

Ms. X: I think so. I don't like to smoke the Indicas that much because of that reason, because they make you want to eat all the time.

CB: Do you have any sense of the whole THC versus CBD content in the plants that you grow? Is it safe to say that there's a higher ratio of THC in Indica or CBD in Sativa?

Ms. X: Well, I don't believe that matters, because I grow Hawaiian Snow, which is a Sativa, and it's 23.7% to 24% THC which is one of the highest that there is.

CB: So it doesn't always hold true that the Indica is higher THC and the Sativa's are higher CBD?

Ms. X: No.

CB: Do you grow many different strains?

Ms. X: This year I'm growing four different kinds of Kush because Kush seems to be popular. All the different seed breeders this year brought different kinds of Kush in, and so I'm going to grow those in my garden this year.

CB: Are those Indicas?

Ms. X: Those are Indicas. So they'll get done earlier. Well, I believe Kush is an Indica because it's really good for patients who aren't hungry, like HIV patients, or cancer patients who are going through chemo. It's really good for that because it just makes them want to eat all the time. When you're not hungry, you can't feel good. When you're wanting to throw up, especially.

CB: Well it stimulates hunger which is one thing, but it also decreases nausea, which is something different.

Ms. X: Right, it does both of those things. The other strain I'm growing this year, I have some Annanuki and Sour Cream, and some other hybrids which are supposedly going to be done in the middle of October instead of having to

grow into November and December. So, with these hybrid strains, they're making it possible for people to grow stuff like Hawaiian Snow, and be done in the middle of October.

CB: So that's the thing about hybrids: they allow plants to grow in different climates. You need that kind of desert climate to raise Sativa, whereas with the hybrids, you can grow them in different climates. Now, Indica's have shorter growing cycles so they mature faster, right? And they take up less space? Indica's are easier to grow indoors because they're smaller and they're faster.

Ms. X: Right.

CB: It seems like there's a lot of people growing indoors these days.

Ms. X: My Sativa is all airy, and it takes until December to grow. If I went to Amsterdam they would charge me like \$14.00 a gram for this stuff, which is a lot compared to the rest of the places where you might pay between \$7 and \$10 a gram, but they can get almost twice as much for the Sativas there, because they have to grow indoors under lights.

CB: So Sativas take longer, take up more room and more energy, and so they have to charge more.

Ms. X: It takes 14 to 16 weeks to grow it. I had one plant this year that was the size of my pool table, it was just this giant, as opposed to this little compact thing that you could stick in your bird cage or your refrigerator. So there's a lot of difference in the size of plants too, and for most people there's two things that make a difference when you're growing buds. The size of your container will reflect the size of your plant. So if you plant your weed in a little tiny paper cup, you can't ever expect to get a big plant out of it. When I grow, I have a John Deere tractor and I'm out there digging holes as big as my pool table and then I plant this little tiny plant in it and that's why my plants get so big, because my holes are so big. Because they have room to grow. And it works the same way inside. If you use a 10 gallon tub to put your plants in, you're going to get a bigger plant than a one gallon container. So people using their closets need to put bigger pots in there.

CB: I have this sense that the people that are growing indoors, they can hyper-control or hyper-manipulate the electricity, the timing of the light exposure, the chemicals, the fertilizers.

Ms. X: Yeah, and they grow with hydroponics.

CB: Right, so there's not even any soil. Now, when you're growing outdoors you can only control your soil or your fertilizer a little bit, so it's much more about the natural conditions, especially the hours of sunlight.

Ms. X: It's easier outdoors, because when you have a controlled environment indoors, if one thing goes wrong, then it messes up your whole room. As outdoors, you might have one thing go wrong, but it's only one plant that dies.

CB: Do you have any sense that growing out doors is the better way to grow and you get a better product or do you not necessarily think that?

Ms. X: Well, if I lived in Maine and I didn't get sun year round, I would definitely grow indoors, if I had the space to do it. You have to use what you have before you. Hopefully, you would have a greenhouse. Another thing people do is they force their plants, so they start covering them on the 4th of July, so they'll get done earlier. You start your buds three weeks earlier, you make your plants think that it's the 1st of August, and you're three weeks ahead of schedule. By the time it gets to be the first week of August, your plant's already been budding for three weeks, so you can be done by the first of September, as opposed to the first of November because a lot of them take 60 days to bud.

CB: You harvest once a year in the fall?

Ms. X: Last year we started around September 23 and we cut our last plant December 8. Right now (May) I have clones going, I have seedlings going, and I have stuff ready to go into the garden; it's all in my greenhouse. I don't have anything in a bud cycle right now at all, because I'd have to use electricity. But I'm getting solar next week so maybe I'll be less opposed to using it after I have free energy. But right now, it's just not worth it, because we get 320 days of sunshine where I live. Another thing is, I'm able to grow 6 plants in California for my script legally, which is a pretty good stash of weed for one year. I grow for me and my honey, and I grow it for two other people. So that right there gives me 24 different kinds of weed.

CB: How does it work legally? You're allowed to grow 6 plants per patient?

Ms. X: Yeah, well I can plant 18 plants for me and 18 plants for my partner. Other people can come to my yard and they're in a collective or a cooperative with me. I have two people this year and they come and help if I call them up and say, "Okay, we're putting in drip lines today," or, "I'm going to Oakland and somebody has to be here to do something," then they'll come and help anytime I need them. So in the end they'll get half of their plants from me that I grow for them. Now it says that I can plant 18 plants, so I just plant the 18 for me and my partner, then it says when they get bigger and mature and I sex them, then I'm supposed to be down to a dozen plants and I'm only supposed to harvest 6 plants. You have to consider that some of these plants get to be two to three pounds each; you don't run out. And you need to store it in a nice cool, dry place. It's really important that when you cure it, you get it really dried out so that it doesn't mildew.

CB: So how do you cure it? Do you hang it upside down or something?

Ms. X: Yes. I cut the big, giant branches off—some of them are about as big as me—and then I hang them up. We tip them upside down and cut all the leaves off, and then we hang them in my garage and I let them dry. I don't turn the air conditioning on in there; some people will dry them in cooler places.

CB: Because they just want to make sure that they don't have any moisture?

Ms. X: Some people want the cure to be slower. Where I am doing it, it's 100 degrees, so unless I run an air conditioners or something, I can't really control it. So what I do is I let it kind of bake itself for a couple days and then make sure that there's no moisture build-up, because that would create mold. After it dries, I make sure it gets really, really dry and then on arm-sized branches, I put it in tubs and close them up. Every four or five days, I go out and turn those tubs to make sure that there's no moisture on the buds. If there is, then I just take the lid off and I leave it off for a day, and when I go back out, they'll be drier. You want to keep it dry, you can always moisten it more to make it sticky, but you can't get the mold out of it. If mold starts growing on your buds, you're pretty much screwed. When I have stuff like that, I just burn it and start over. So it's really important how you cure it because at this time of the year you don't want to be down to the stuff that's moldy.

CB: You said that when you cure it, you hang it upside down. You get rid of the leaves, right? So you're just hanging the buds upside down?

Ms. X: Right. I take the leaves all of, and I feed them to the chickens or the goats or whatever farm animal seems to be around.

CB: They like it?

Ms. X: Yup, the goats love it. One thing that we do is, we take some of the clippings and we'll have a water-hash making day. We'll use the cold water system to get the crystals off of the leafing. That's really nice for cooking.

CB: So you use the cold water to get the crystals off the leaves to make hash?

Ms. X: Yes. You just throw it in a little wash machine and then what drains out of it has hash in it. I actually use that for cooking and baking. The trichomes are actually what is consumed. I take them off with a tumbler and the dry method, and do you know what a pollinator is?

CB: I don't, but I understand there are different ways to make hash and there's a water way and there's a dry way.

Ms. X: A pollinator is like a little clothes dryer, and you put the buds in the tumbler, and it goes around and the crystals fall out through the silk screen and you scrape the pollen up.

CB: But then you can still smoke those buds without that pollen, right?

Ms. X: Yes.

CB: What is the legal risk of what you're doing? Do you feel like you're perfectly safe and staying within the law?

Ms. X: It's just like anything else. If they are to come in and put you under a microscope and look for something wrong, they could find it I'm sure.

CB: How much do you worry about that?

Ms. X: Well because we've been here, established for a long time, I worry less, but at the same time, I'm very cautious and conscientious of what the rules are. I like to go down every year and get a copy of our county guidelines. It's important to me, like at the end of the year as opposed to killing some of my plants if I have too many, I often go out and find other people who for whatever reason, weren't able to grow this year, I will actually take their paperwork in the end, and I usually end up with more paperwork than I need. Then I just give people one to three pounds, depending on how long I use their paperwork and I just give them that amount of weed. It's for my own protection and I like to do it for people who I know that really use the medicine for the right reasons. I'd like to consider myself a privatized dispensary. And the reason why I say that is because most people I know can't take three pounds of weed home in November and still have some now. It would be gone. They would give it away, they would smoke it, somebody would steal it, or something would happen to it. They would call me up three months later and go, "It molded." So then I put myself at risk by rationing them, but I do that for them. I put myself out there by hanging onto it longer and giving them a smaller amount at a time. If anybody ever asks why I have so much, I hope those people step up and say, "She's making sure I have some in August and September, because hers won't be done until October."

CB: Are you politically active at all when it comes to medical marijuana?

Ms. X: I have some friends that are with Patients Out of Time, and I went to a few NORML Conferences, but I really haven't put myself out there. I get easily over-activated and the next thing you know I've got too much going on. Honestly, I just try to stay away from it. I went to the Cannabis Cup a few years ago, and now I've been going for a few years. I feel like that's my outlet.

CB: What's your role at the Cannabis Cup? What do you do there?

Ms. X: I work for Steve Hager. It's called the Temple Dragon Crew. We're the crew that helps do the whole cup, helps take in the buds and make sure that everybody's happy. Make sure people have everything they need when they're up there smoking because you get those celebrity judges and they have to judge around 60 different kinds of weed in like seven days. That's almost impossible to do.

CB: Is the Cannabis Cup useful for you in terms of networking or learning any new growing information? It struck me as a cross between a 4H club at a county fair, and a grower's convention.

Ms. X: Sure it's useful. They have a grow seminar every day during the Cup. You can find out all kinds of things about genetics and stuff. I wasn't even up on Indicas and Sativas before I started going to Cannabis Cup. I knew there was a difference, but I didn't know that much about it. I've learned so much in the last four years of going to Amsterdam, and all these different growers are over there working with genetics and stuff, they've come a long way in all the different methods they can create a hybrid. I think it's done in 40 days as opposed to taking 14 weeks and you're getting the same medicine. And they can grow short, little fat plants that you can grow inside that have the same effect.

CB: So when they're manipulating the genetics, part of it is just so that it will be easier and quicker to grow indoors?

Ms. X: Yes, and for mold resistance. People on the coast, they have mildew, they get powdery mildew. People that grow in the bay area, the mold actually starts growing on their plants before they ever pick it.

CB: I understand that's a problem with HIV patients, that if they have moldy or mildewed pot, they can get fungal infections. Is that true?

Ms. X: Right. That's why it's so important, the way you cure it.

CB: That's why if you have something moldy or mildewy, you just get rid of it. You don't give it to patients because it's too dangerous.

Ms. X: Yes.

CB: What else can you tell me about genetic manipulation and hybridizing plants? Anything you can comment on about seeds or strains?

Ms. X: I go with God Bud. It's one of the best strains I've smoked in years.

CB: What is it?

Ms. X: It's a hybrid. They crossed Sweet Tooth into it, which is a Sativa, but I don't know what they crossed it into. The person that won the 17th Cup a few years ago said it wouldn't grow outside, but because of my climate, I'm able to grow it outside. It's beautiful.

CB: There was an article in High Times about you growing some twelve year-old seeds that you got from Amsterdam, do you have a sense of the difference between new and old strains? Does it matter that they are so old or does it make them more preferable?

Ms. X: I grew four of one kind and then six of another, all of these different old plants that I grew. He'd grown them years ago and picked out his favorites; that's what he started his seed lines with. So over the years, people's tastes change. Whatever people pick as their favorite, everybody wants a certain flavor. Nowadays, everybody wants purple flavor. I grew like five different plants, one that was just this beautiful amethyst color purple and we called it amethyst, and in Europe, years ago, they grew that. My friend used to grow it over there a dozen years ago when everybody wanted purple then. Now it's come around to the Purple Granddaddy Indica, and it has a grape flavor. One of the seeds I grew was called Original Neville Bigbud. When you open the container now, it just smells like grapes. You can smell the color purple when you open the tub.

CB: Can you help me to understand genetic manipulation and hybridization better? How is it that you can get different strains coming from crossing the same seeds?

Ms. X: Last year as an example, I grew Church. Church is a Northern Lights times Number One Skunk, times Brazilian Sativa.

CB: So you're saying that three plants were sort of hybridized to make one plant and the seeds from that one plant are Church?

Ms. X: Yes. So Northern Lights grows a big, bushy plant. Big buds, called colas, and they're very leafy. Then I had four seeds of Number One Skunk, which I planted. One of these plants grew to be a giant, and it had these Northern Lights-type buds with big, dark green leaves. All you saw were leaves, even when the bud was on it. And then next to it is this little, teeny short plant which only grew about three feet tall and it had buds the size of my pinkie on it. All of these came out of the same package of seeds.

CB: I guess it's the same idea as my parents having three kids, and they're all completely different.

Ms. X: Right. So, in California, because we're not allowed to sell the seeds, we sell the clones. We're able to plant the ten seeds and then pick out the one plant that's going to be the best. Now, the third plant that I grew off the Northern Lights was a Number One Skunk. It had a beautiful, thick perfect bud, it didn't have too much leaf on it, it had the beautiful red hairs, it was high, it was firm, it was everything you'd want in a bud. So, say I want to have 20 of this kind of plant next year for the consistency, I would pick the one that grew like the Number One Skunk, especially if I was growing for clubs. If I was going to take it out and sell it and market my product, then I would want something that was more attractive. That would be my reasoning for choosing that over the others. The people that are doing the clones, they're working on marketability.

CB: So if you plant clones, you know exactly what you are going to get. There's no roll of the dice the way there is with genetic assortment. But, do you enjoy cross pollinating different lines?

Ms. X: Well, last year was the first year I've ever had seeds, and they ended up getting pollinated by Nebula, which is a beautiful plant; it's consistently two to three pounds of skunky, beautiful crystals that get done in 60 days.

CB: So Nebula is mostly Indica?

Ms. X: Right. It's from Paradise Seed Company; they grow some beautiful buds, and most of theirs are on the Indica side. So, if I had to get pollinated with something, that was a good choice. So now, everything I have has all these perfect characteristics. It makes a couple of pounds per plant, nice, tight, hard buds, and 60 days. You don't want to breed anything into your plant that's going to take lengthen the grow cycle, because then you're waiting for Christmas weed, and you're taking a chance that the weather is going to affect it. If I have these big, thick, fat plants but then it rains the whole first week in October, there's a chance that half of it could have mildew in the middle of it when I pick it. Or, the rain can beat it into the ground and it breaks, and I have to pick it early.

CB: At the Cannabis Cup, I spoke to a grower who was planning on growing an Indica called Ménage a Trios, from the Myth of Destruction seed bank. It accidentally got pollinated by a pure Sativa male he had missed culling, called Sativa Mexicana from Sativa Seed Bank. So he has a fairly pure Indica and a fairly pure Sativa that cross pollinated. So what would you expect from the resulting seeds?

Ms. X: When you grow those little seeds, they're going to show those Sativa traits right when it starts growing. And if you're looking at real skinny, long leaves then your chances of it having Indica traits are probably real slim.

CB: So you can look at it pretty early in the game and get a sense of which one is predominant. Would real hybrids look like something between a Sativa and an Indica or is it going to declare itself as looking like one or the other?

Ms. X: It has a lot to do with the conditions where you grow it. We planted ten seeds a couple weeks ago, and these seeds have taken off and they're like two feet tall; they have passed all the other seedlings. Then I planted like eight more seeds a couple days ago, and I thought they were the exact same genetics, but these are little bitty plants. So it's the luck of the draw.

CB: How much danger are you in, with what you're doing?

Ms. X: As long as I grow under 100 plants right here, I've never had a problem. I try to stay way below the Federal limits. If I wanted to plant 200 plants, I'd get another house.

CB: Do you have any kind of relationship with the local Sheriff or the DEA? Do they leave you alone?

Ms. X: Yes, I know who they are. In fact, the guy who's the head of the DEA, if he sees us downtown having dinner, he'll stop by our table and say hi to us. So, they all know who we are, and they all know we grow medical marijuana here. Like I said, I've always gone in to get a copy of their guidelines for the year and follow the rules.

CB: Do you pay taxes from your pot sales? Or would you? How does that work?

Ms. X: If I thought I could go down to Oakland and sell \$5,000 worth of weed and then just pay the taxes on it, I would. Because that makes me a law-abiding citizen.

I have a couple of patients who can't come and work. After they reach their limit on how much I can give them, if they get to a certain point where I allow them to purchase it from me, I take that money as a donation to my ranch. So I'm able to buy feed for my animals and buy things I need for the garden: irrigation equipment and things like that. I have goats that I tend, and I use their manure to mix with the soil that I grow the weed in. I have about 400 free-range birds that run all over outside, and they keep the grasshoppers and other bugs and snakes at a minimum. I've been trying to be more sustainable. Every year I've been planting more fruit trees.

Also, I try to promote everyone to grow their own. I help people set up a situation that's simple and sustainable, and I act like a consultant, because I honestly believe that the best medicine is this: if I can give you a seed, and you have to get up everyday and water and care for that seed, that's better medicine than me just giving you some weed.

CB: It can be therapeutic to help something grow, to care for another living thing. I totally agree with that, except that, clearly there are some patients that are just too sick and weak to get down on their knees to tend to their plants.

Ms. X: Right. Those are the people that I'm working the co-op with. They might just come over and spend a few hours just sitting out there, watching me work. They'll come out maybe once every other week and just spend a few hours out there in the garden.

CB: But it's still probably therapeutic just for them to be out in nature, with the sun and the breeze and the trees, out in the garden.

Ms. X: It is. That's just part of the medicine, getting out there and watching the plants grow, seeing that life. We try to help as many people as we can to get set up where they can have their own sustainable gardens. Or, we pair up people with partners, somebody who can work with someone who can't. We try to set up little neighborhood communities. But it's all about growing a medicine that really helps people. The more people who use it, like cancer patients, once they've tried it a couple times, they realize how useful it is. My partner's dad just passed away a couple years ago. After his chemotherapy, he would be so sick he just couldn't do anything. But when he would smoke, he started eating again.