

## Kiss My Aster

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### Flaming Tidbits

Amanda Thomsen



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I don't have a full, cohesive column to give you, but there are lots of little, bite-sized things going on, so I'm naming this one after an appetizer assortment tray from a local restaurant of my youth, Flaming Tidbits (yes, there is fire involved). Shout out to Malahini Terrace in Darien, Illinois. And I say this to the only "room" that could possibly find it funny, but my spellcheck always changes "Malahini" to "Malathion."

**Bingo cards:** I have a ton of 2025 business goals running around in my head, but hadn't put pen to paper until I saw bingo-style vision boards on Pinterest and whoa! If you're someone who likes ticking off items on a to-do list, how can you deny yourself making a bingo card with your deadly serious financial goals, human resource planning and community commitments in tiny squares, while hoping to glue hot pink

pompons on each when accomplished? I am insisting that Tyler makes one for his goals this year, too; I remember how hard it was to make professional goals when I was his age, but there's something about the Bingo aspect that makes it easy. I downloaded a Bingo template from Google and printed it on cardstock, filled it out and hung it in my ramshackle office. I love this!

**Customer of the Year:** My Square register system sent me an email right after the New Year inviting me to meet our customer of the year. I didn't have to look (I knew!), but it was cool to see that our favorite local, Karen, had made 52 purchases last year totaling \$3,000. I love that the register doesn't qualify her by money spent, but visits. Karen visits us EVERY DAY, sometimes bringing us pastries or coffee. She sits on our sofa and visits and we drop everything to chat with her. She shouts recommendations at customers from the couch who have no idea what is going on here. The other day I was knee deep in creating something weird for a wedding party and Karen asked to help me. I was like, "What the hell do you think you're going to do to help, Karen?" But I almost wanted to say yes just to see how many stems SHE could fit in an antique brass tussie mussie vessel. TLDR; I'm doing it, I'm creating a place for community to spontaneously happen.

**Soup party:** Speaking of community, enough people have mentioned "just wanting to hang out" at the shop or even further, creating an event to meet other cool customers, that I have planned a SOUP PARTY at the shop next weekend. It's free, just bring soup (or a baguette) and we'll all eat soups and chatter. I have 10 registrations already and that's TEN SOUPS! It's like a dream come true for me. I have no financial designs for this event, but I might bring gumbo. That part is still undecided.

**My uniform:** I've realized that over the last two-plus years my usual vibrant dress code has dulled to more of a uniform and I'm overthinking it. I'm so thrilled with how things are going and yet I get up every morning and wear one

of a small rotation of wholly utilitarian outfits. Where's my sparkle? Well, the sparkle is inside so much that I don't care who sees it. I'm not sure where I'm going to go next with this; I miss the colors, but I can promise you that I'll get up tomorrow and put the dang Duluth Trading shirt with 14 pockets on over a soft T and good jeans with a jaunty neckerchief and some clogs regardless. What is happening to me?

**Cultivate:** Do you like me? Cool, cool. Come see me with my excellent friends Katie Elzer-Peters and Ben Futa as we take over a ballroom for a WHOLE DAY in Columbus this July. Our track is talking to local, independent plant sellers about how rad they are. If this applies to you, I better see you there! **GP**

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*Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author now with her own store, Aster Gardens in Lemont, Illinois. Her store info is at [KissMyAster.com](https://www.kissmyaster.com), and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Threads AND Instagram @KissMyAster.*