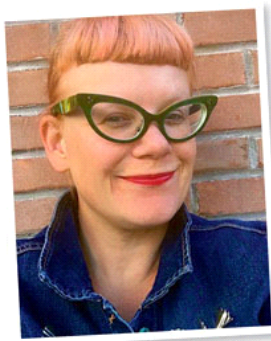


Kiss My Aster

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Ownership to Spread Around Like Cinnamon Butter

Amanda Thomsen



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I just finished up with a holiday planning meeting with my favorite staff members over pumpkin pancakes at a local restaurant. For me, it's important for these kinds of meetings to not be in the store where I'm sidetracked to the max and for the restaurant to not be super close to the shop because then people recognize us and we end up giving out directions on how to prune hydrangeas. Can you empathize? I thought so.

For years, it was more of a little flying by the seat of my pants; I'd have a rough theme and a wisp of a plan, but I'm over that now in order to scale. It has to be less about me and more about the team—so let's get together over a giant pot of coffee and figure it out so that there's ownership to spread around like cinnamon butter.

Instead of me just metaphorically eating all the cinnamon butter on my lonesome.

I am heavily into theming because my brain has so much crammed into it and having a theme helps me pull things out in order. My theme going into this season was "Kitschmas," which is best explained as Christmas with the B-52's and John Waters. More recently, we've added a respectful, but campy, salute to Dolly Parton to the mix, so we're trying to pull together an entire theme of "Dolly Kitschmas!"

I arrived at the meeting, armed with pages of outlines (that I shouted into my phone via voice dictation over the last few weeks) and photos (that I've saved over the last few years) to go over and each subject had a space to assign ownership of each task we came up with. My employees countered with their own great ideas and it was like a really great inspirational ping-pong match. A few times I had to pull the train back on the tracks because we only had two hours to spend and setting boundaries is seemingly new for everybody.

From moving fixtures to window displays, we went over everything. From pre-sales and special orders to our plan for winter pots and what kind of time-lapse videos we should shoot for social media, we went over all of it, including which blow molds would most accent our holiday theme. I envy people who can analyze Christmas earlier in the year, but I can't do it until I can at least get a sweater on.



We're doubling down on making experiences for people to enjoy, especially things that are kid-friendly, but not kid-centric. I've found that there's a magic area in the middle of that Venn diagram at Christmas. People want to do things that don't make their kids miserable, but also aren't specifically for kids. It's extremely difficult to be cool and have kids, bless those that keep trying.

A peek at the courtyard at Aster Gardens, taken during a visit last October.

Last year we had a Krampus event that was a really big deal. We're trying to figure out how to do that better for the people who really got it. This year we're including a

mailbox for kids to write letters to Krampus so they can beg for their lives ... and, listen, that's not for everybody. We're going to counterbalance with some extra St. Nicholas wholesomeness, somehow.

In our courtyard, we're adding a tent for extended possibilities for classes and events. Of course it had to be inspected by the local fire marshal. It needs a permit, so add this to the holiday version of "death by a thousand cuts." It's only 10x15 and we can pop it down if there's bad weather, but this is new territory for me and as much as it seems like a good idea I am 100% getting cold feet about it now.

Did I just Google a batch recipe for espresso martinis? Yes, I did. **GP**

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