

Front Lines

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Congrats, Amanda!

Jennifer Zurko



Green Profit columnist, garden blogger, speaker and all-around awesome person Amanda Thomsen made the plunge and opened her very own storefront plant shop in July.

Called Aster Gardens (taken from her blog's name, *Kiss My Aster*), it's located in the center of the Chicago suburb of Lemont, Illinois. And since it was a short drive away, I wanted to stop by Amanda's grand opening and ribbon cutting to show our support and to check out her new place.

If you know Amanda or read her columns on a regular basis, then you'll understand when I say Aster Gardens

is very Amanda. The words "These Plants Are Your Destiny" welcomed me when I walked in, with Blondie's "Heart of Glass" playing in the background.

Aster Gardens has a good mix of houseplants, gifts and accessories, apparel and overall just cool stuff, which is Amanda's intended goal. She wants her offerings to be non-pretentious and easily accessible.

"Stuff for tattooed moms," she says.

Amanda's focus is also on being more eco-friendly with reused and recycled materials. "I'm trying to do things the way I want it," she explains. And all of the plant material is sourced from growers in the Chicagoland area and nearby Michigan.

There's a small kitchen area in the back where she'll hold small workshops and events. Amanda doesn't want to be a full-fledged florist, but she started her first foray into producing wedding favors and will see where that goes. And right next to the store there's a grassy area that Amanda eventually wants to expand into an outdoor seating/small event area where she'll sell shrubs and even Christmas trees during the holidays.



Opening her own plant shop “was always a dream, but I never thought it was possible,” she says. For the last 10 years, she’s been “drowning in motherhood,” so it wasn’t top of mind until recently, now that her daughter Hazel is going into middle school.

Ultimately, Amanda just wants Aster Gardens to be a cool place for people to come visit. She wants them to buy stuff, of course, but to also re-visit for multiple reasons.

“Even though I’ve always been a purist, I realize that I’m making a space for people to have events, take great photos and make great memories,” she says. **GP**