



# JUST FOOD START UP FARM PROGRAM

*Cultivating new farmers in the Ottawa region*

## New Farmer Case Study: Amber Westfall, The Wild Garden

Products: Wild Foods and Healing Plants

Where to Buy: Just Food Farm Gate Stand, through the Wild Food and Herb CSA, and at special events

Website: [www.thewildgarden.ca](http://www.thewildgarden.ca)



***Just Food's Start up Farm Program*** offers access to land, shared infrastructure/equipment, and training for new farmers. Participants can access up to 3 years of on-site support at our farm in the Ottawa Greenbelt.

*The program creates a low-risk entry point for a diversity of new farmers to test business ideas, and to build skills and experience. Our goal is to enable more people in the Ottawa region to start their own successful farm business.*

*Just Food takes applications each fall for new farmers to join the program in the upcoming year. The program is geared mainly towards annual producers, but we welcome innovative proposals for other business models.*

For more information, please visit:  
<http://justfood.ca/start-up-farm-program/>

### "I planted dandelions on purpose"

Amber Westfall established the Wild Garden in 2013 as part of Just Food's Start up Farm Program. Unlike most of the program's annual farmers, Amber focuses on permaculture design, and has established a partnership to maintain a perennial plot at Just Food. Using regenerative growing and harvesting methods, Amber produces healing and wild plant foods, and enjoys sharing the benefits of these plants with the public.

Amber's calling to permaculture stemmed from a growing awareness of environmental issues and a desire to do something constructive in order to lessen her consumption. She quickly became aware of her "green thumb", leading her to develop a particular interest in plants for medicinal purposes, and inspiring her to support local food production.

### Super foods in your backyard

No need to seek out exotic crops from afar! Amber shares the amazing properties found in what most of us consider common weeds. Did you know dandelions are full of antioxidants, vitamins and protein? Or that stinging nettle can be prepared to make a delicious dish rich in iron and protein? Amber shows us the nutritional and medicinal benefits of wild plants that grow everywhere in our cities, fields, parks, and right outside our doorsteps!





## Turning a Passion into a Livelihood:

“I realized I didn’t have to buy land, live on a farm and own a car, in order to farm.”

Amber was pleased to discover permaculture as a proactive, hopeful solution to many of the major environmental issues we are faced with today. Initially, she was challenged when she decided to put her perennial farm dream into practice. This dream seemed out of reach for Amber in many ways. Things like access to land for farming were difficult to imagine for someone who lived in a small downtown apartment. However, Amber was determined to find an alternative that would suit her needs.

After attending a series of farming workshops, a permaculture design course and being inspired by examples of other farmers, Amber knew that she could be successful without having to follow a classic “Family Farm” mentality.

This realization opened a world of possibilities for Amber. Rather than buy land, she decided to look for a long-term lease. Just Food was establishing its Start Up Farm Program at this time, and looking for new farmers. A creative partnership was established that allowed Amber to join the program, and to continue growing on the site in future years as a partner project, animating permaculture activities for Just Food and her business.

Amber is very grateful for the resources the Start-up Farm Program has allowed her to access. Not only has it granted her access to land, but also the shared equipment, workshops and human resources have allowed her to come a long way with her permaculture business.

The Wild Garden takes a different farming approach than that of vegetable production. The main focus is on perennial plants that are well acclimatized to withstand extended seasons and extreme weather. Many of Amber’s successes are due to this diverse model of resilient plants. Her Wild Food and Herb CSA has gained popularity, being the only one of its kind in Ottawa and one of very few in Ontario.

Amber highly recommends the Start-up Farm Program to those who are passionate about growing food as a business. It has helped her realize that you should never feel limited from pursuing a dream, and that there are always alternatives to making things work.

## Reconnecting people and plants

On top of many delicious foods and healing plant products, the Wild Garden also offers a variety of fun and educational activities. Amber leads plant walks, workshops and gives courses on a number of permaculture-related topics, including children’s programming. Her latest course features Wild Edibles and Medicinal Plants. Stay tuned to the Wild Garden’s website for new educational programs!

