

Not your garden-variety garden store

Carson Arthur's new market in Prince Edward County is sprouting a new kind of gardening experience

coverstory

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Special to Postmedia Network

With homegrown fruits and veggies quickly becoming the new Canadian pastime, one of Canada's favourite TV garden experts — Carson Arthur — has found a unique way to cultivate a new generation of gardeners.

In May, Arthur opened the doors to Carson's Garden & Market, a boutique garden centre in the heart of Ontario's Prince Edward County in Bloomfield, a drivable distance from both Toronto and Ottawa.

Designed from the ground up to be a garden lover's refuge, it's a place where you'll find heirloom seeds, pruners and secateurs made from the same steel used in Japanese samurai swords, handmade tools and a host of one-of-a-kind garden products.

"When I was a kid growing up, we had a fantastic hardware store in my tiny little town that had a seed wall and great tools that were hand-crafted," said Arthur, who says his inspiration came from those childhood memories.

"I find today, it doesn't matter which box store you go to, it's always the same lines of gardening products and you're basically trying to decide which one has the better price ... I decided to step away from that."

Instead, Arthur is showcasing products he uses in his own home that you won't find in a big box garden centre. Among the items are two lines of hand tools, one from the Netherlands and one from a Mennonite forger; a library of garden books to borrow or buy; and, a range of planters, pots, garden décor and clothing. You'll even find fresh alpaca manure — the best garden fertilizer, according to Arthur.

"The biggest surprise has been how ready Canadians are for a higher end garden store," he said, noting that the store hit its first-year financial target in just eight weeks.

"People are saying, 'Yes! This is what we wanted. Something that is unique and leading us in a direction that we're excited and passionate about going.'"

There are more than 400 varieties of seeds on the Carson's Garden & Market seed wall, including



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some that are a thousand years old. Through a local partnership with Edible Antiques, the market grows and conserves heirloom varieties of vegetables and flowers; seeds are also brought in from suppliers in eastern and western Canada.



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"We're losing a lot of our food diversity so I really wanted to focus on the food you can grow in your home," said Arthur, who aims to share his passion about food sustainability through his store.

"We have a preconceived notion of what a tomato looks like, and what the perfect head of cauliflower should be, and often those are not the ones you grow yourself, they're the ones you get from overseas," he added.

The entire structure was built to be eco-friendly, using MicroPro Sienna

pressure treated wood that is engineered to withstand the elements and has no off-gassing of harmful chemicals.

In the greenhouse, visitors will find coffee, mango and avocado trees, along with all sorts of new "flavours" of crops that can be grown in yards, on balconies or on rooftops during summer and brought inside during winter.

"This is just me doing my thing," said Arthur. "To me, investing in our own outdoor spaces to grow food just makes so much sense."



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