

AUTUMN 2014

County & Quinte LIVING

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY AND QUINTE REGION



INSIDE:
Prince Edward
County's welcoming
east side, and so
much more inside...

Thyme Again Gardens

Carrying on traditional organic
living in The Carrying Place



Article by Amy James

Photography by Daniel Vaughan

Carrying Place, a small community northwest of Picton and south of Trenton, is named for its location as a historical portage between the Bay of Quinte and Weller's Bay. The nine-mile stretch, portaged hundreds of years ago by First Nations people, was an important place of demarcation in the journey – a forward divide.

The ancient portage continues to mark passage into Prince Edward County and continues to offer a way forward. A new type of homestead, Thyme Again Gardens, offers an authentic approach to food and farming, in line with First Nations principles of respect for the land. Thyme Again is a place where it is time again to portage an age-old philosophy as a future gateway for food production and consumption.

Following the dusty asphalt down Smokes Point Road brings weary road-trippers and local explorers face to face with Thyme Again Gardens. An organic farm and bed and breakfast, the red brick farmhouse and sprawling acres is an oasis from concrete condos and genetically modified life. Modern paving and century old dirt begin the portage back, directly into the home and hearts of Lorraine Schmid and Lori Aselstine. Owning and operating an organic farm is simply a life decision, labour, and love.

Lorraine, a holistic nutritionist and farmer, has been passionate about organic farming for years. With a wide range of definitions, not all uses of the term organic are equitable. For example, organic monocropping or a monoculture may not allow food to be sprayed but the food is grown uniformly, and lack of diversity is not how nature functions.

For Lorraine, organic farming is not just about the absence of pesticides but rather a holistic approach to growing food, which requires an integrated understanding of how nature works. Lorraine simply states, "For me, the question was never whether to farm organically or not; I wouldn't be



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able to sleep otherwise. Having started organically, there were never any issues around switching from more conventional techniques and we grew over time.”

While there are many levels of organic farming, certification as an organic farm means adherence to certain biodynamic principles. The underlying philosophy of the farm is to reconnect with the earth and when farming, the connection first begins with creating a healthy soil. “We promote health from the ground up,” Lorraine shares. “We put in buckwheat to smother weeds, and add other plants deliberately to mingle or prevent mingling. We do not till into the soil, but apply a manure mixture from

all the animals of the farm, decomposed, and add mulch with straw. The weeds are handpicked. By adding organics to the soil, we improve the quality, and we hand cultivate the rows so as not to disturb the microbes needed to maintain the soil ecosystem.”

Having studied nutrition and the environment, Lorraine became increasingly interested in farming because of a desire to understand exactly how food was produced. “As I learned about how food was manipulated and altered, I knew I wanted to farm and change what we were eating. I used to be a vegetarian, and have gone back to eating meat because I know the quality



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*Owning and operating an organic farm is simply
a life decision, labour, and love.*

of the pork and beef produced here. I know what the animals are eating, by way of feed as well as grazing, how their presence contributes to the overall functionality of the farm, and how the animals living together benefit each other. For example, we do not spray for bugs. The chickens eat the bugs and fly larvae while grazing with the sheep and cows. The pigs naturally root which turns soil and removes insects and weeds hampering crop production. The farm is a living and integrated entity where nature does naturally what is needed. Nature is collaborative."

Lori also knows, "We need to protect what we have and not overproduce. We only produce what we can." Rhubarb and beans are not in season all year long and asparagus can take up to three years before ready for harvest. Orders for pork, beef, lamb, chicken, and turkey are best placed in advance, as again, butchering season is

August to December. These limitations can be confusing to consumers unfamiliar with the cycles and seasons of organic farming but both Lori and Lorraine are committed to farming to the advantage of the earth rather than taking advantage. Regarding how the crops are laid out, Lori is quick to add, "Lorraine is the brains of the operation, knowing what to plant when and where...I just ride the tractor," she laughs.

In truth, Lori does ride the tractor but also takes inventory and keeps the books in the farm stand. A marvelous open-air store with a fridge cooling eggs, a freezer of meat, and shelves of chutney, jam, and salsa operates on the honour system. On the longest counter at one end stands a large mason jar and what looks like an open guest book. "We cannot afford to pay someone to sit in the stand full-time, so we leave the jar for the money and the book for people to record what they purchased," Lori states.

Upon inquiry she confirmed, "Yes, the numbers add up, we had a problem one time but the community responded and the lost money came in, otherwise we would have to close the store."

With the prices clearly marked, casual shoppers are able to purchase what is available each day, from berries and fresh eggs to meats or products from other green community businesses. As participants in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, Lorraine and Lori also provide the seasonally available heirloom fruits and vegetables as well as heritage lamb, beef, pork, chicken, and turkey to members who own a share in the program and pay a certain amount at the beginning of each year. In return, each week the members receive what is in season. With one CSA in Toronto, Lori travels each Tuesday to bring the organic produce to Olive and Olives, where she has networked to set up shop. In Carrying Place, the second CSA is the farm stand operating on the honour system, where members cash in their dollar coupons for whatever is available, and where they can also purchase the exceptional products produced by Olive and Olives.

As members of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF), Lorraine and Lori also often have workers come and stay on the farm, experiencing alternate ways to produce food while contributing to the daily activities of sowing or weeding.

Education and community support are key tenets in Lori and Lorraine's endeavours, and their open farm days offer another way to integrate individuals

with farming. The public is able to visit the organic farm and learn all about biodynamic principles, ask questions, discover where their food is coming from, and get to know the local farmers.

From the recycled window greenhouse to the great blue heron – a distant relative of the dinosaur – perched atop the house, the historical legacy of Thyme Again Gardens is as much about carrying forward as a portage of past respect.

The whole enterprise whispers it is time again to return to a knowledge of nature and how the earth functions. It is time again to demystify food and eating, to learn how crops and cattle interact. It is time again to connect with community. It is time again to honour simply, through a food stand, a co-op of support, genuine farming, authentic food, real passion, a natural interdependence and interaction.

From the carefully nurtured foods and tended animals to the strong history of the land, there speaks a commitment to community, personal wellness, and connection; a gracious attitude to let nature work and to leave the earth as found.



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