

**Growing a Community Through Food: Interview with Amber Hamby  
Pictured below in nothing other than her element.**

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The morning dew covers the grounds and plants of Oak Park's Pansy Community Garden as the sun continues to rise at nine in the morning. Even though the dirt is still moist from the previous night and the air is cool and crisp, Amber Hamby seems unbothered by the temperature or the wetness. In regular fashion, she shows up there to set up gloves and tools in preparation for the volunteers who will soon join her. She opens the garden on behalf of Alchemist CDC several mornings a week as part of a routine that speaks to something much more than horticulture and agriculture.

Amber Hamby is an impressive, hardworking individual who inspires individuals every day. Hamby has been the Alchemist CDC Garden Coordinator since July of 2025, which

surprisingly shocked us only because the garden is Hamby's area of expertise you would have expected her to have been born and raised there!

Hamby's most challenging part of her job is getting dependable funding and support to meet the program's goals. This made us realize how difficult community-based work can be, even when the need is clear. Given all the challenges, Hamby's motivation and lifelong commitment of "teaching others, and wanting to improve access to healthy food for others that are in need"

But Hamby's strong and passionate about improving food systems and helping the families who are in need. Pictured below are some of Hamby's very gr (OWN)!!



Alchemist's mission statement aligns almost perfectly with Amber's own values, the importance of food accessibility and community involvement. Hamby knew Alchemist was nothing other than a perfect fit due to her background in food systems and enthusiasm for

working outdoors in the garden, Hamby stated, “Alchemist tackles real community issues with diverse, hands-on solutions and that’s why I love being part of it.”

Not only are community gardens a great place to meet people, but they're so great for educating people about the origins of their food and fresh produce! Gardens like the one Amber oversees contribute to a place where community members can develop new hobbies, make connections and experience the power of community. This is all made and developed with the help of volunteers.

We asked Amber how much she relies on student volunteers for her daily operations; she said “Yes, I do. Ideally, I would like to have more time to train others on the types of native plants they will see in the gardens and what are common invasive plants to weed out.” This is why we chose to tackle this project, as we want to encourage the community to get more involved!