

Springfield Farm



Discover "Yurtself" at Springfield Farm

By: Andrew Reed

Apple Hill
Available year-round
\$135/night
www.airbnb.ca

A 19th century farmhouse greets you as you arrive at Springfield Farm located in Apple Hill Ont., owned by Eleanor McGrath, a documentary film maker and her husband Finbarr McCarthy, an engineer. The lush green space filled with different species of flowers and plants looks out onto rolling vibrant green hills and farmers' fields allow you to appreciate nature in a whole new way.

In 2014, Toronto residents McGrath and McCarthy decided to split their time between Toronto and a working farm so they could raise their family within a strong farming community and participate in the growing "field to table" movement.

But it was almost like it was meant to be. McGrath would discover she had family history rooted

in the region, while McCarthy noted how the sprawling hills reminded him of his native Ireland.

“This was the second farm we looked at,” McGrath said. “As soon as we saw it, we fell in love.”

The 118-acre working farm includes organic corn, wheat, honeybees, a vast selection of vegetation, and the original 200-year-old dairy barn.

But perhaps the most unique fixture on the homestead is the 100 per cent Canadian handmade lamb wool yurt tucked away in the trees only a few steps between the farmhouse and barn.

A round tent draped with skins or felts, the yurt provides warmth in the winter and relief from heat during the summer. Originally used by nomads 3000 years ago as a portable dwelling in Asia, yurts have gained recent popularity and have since become a large part of what is known as “glamping.”

The open concept yurt found on Springfield Farm was created in Picton Ont., and took six months to build. It features sleeping arrangements for three, while offering views of the farming landscape and starry night sky. For a true outdoor experience, campers have access to the outhouse closely located to the yurt.

“We want to use the yurt as a place for inspiration and relaxation,” McGrath explained.

Inspired by their childhood experiences with camping, McGrath and McCarthy looked into establishing a unique tourist destination that combined nature and heritage.

Coming from a family of nine, McGrath recalls camping being an affordable vacation.

“My dad bought an army tent and we would use that when we went camping,” she said. “It’s a great way to get to know your country.”

While McCarthy, who emigrated from Ireland in 1982, remembers traveling across Europe as a boy scout, all while staying in a tent.

“That total trip probably cost about \$50 and that’s what we wanted to recreate here,” McCarthy said. “An affordable and unique experience.”

And that’s exactly what McGrath and McCarthy are doing while falling in love with the heritage of the region. For example, the farmhouse they live in now has only passed through a handful of owners.

“We’ve always been interested in homesteading and obviously that is a huge part of the history and heritage in this region,” McGrath said.

McGrath and McCarthy are dedicated to keeping the farm in the family and passing it on to their children as they continue to expand and upgrade the facilities located on the farm, including updating the dairy barn to become a functioning artesian café.

But McGrath and McCarthy, modern pioneers if you will, say the farm and yurt are about more than just experiencing nature.

“We want to change the way people think,” McGrath said.

McGrath is referring to not only appreciating the beauty and nature of the farm and region, but the history and struggles early farmers experienced while clearing hundreds of acres without the aid of modern technology.

“It gives you a new respect for our ancestors and farmers,” McCarthy said. “And that’s what we want everyone to discover.”