

Dig This!

Summer 2020



We've been busy creating virtual events for you, and more.

Online shopping is now better than ever

The DIG website has a new **shop** feature, where you can purchase fashionable DIG accessories and DIGshirts ~ t-shirts featuring vintage-style engraved images of veggies and fruits. Colourful and artsy!

www.durhamdigs.ca/shop

Also, read about our **new YouTube channel**, on page 2



Magical Mystical Garden Tour

A community-focused virtual event to celebrate growing food sustainably and close to home!

JOIN US!
For a virtual tour of various amazing community gardens across Durham Region

VIEW THE TOUR
At your convenience, any time after August 8, 2020 on our DIG YouTube Channel
www.youtube.com/channel/UCeJ-TdLlyuvv2Ck-uDgs7eQ

TELL US
How is your gardening going?
Let us know by Tweeting us a quote that captures your garden experience during the garden season, June 15 - October 31, 2020
twitter.com/durhamdigs

LEARN FROM US
Watch DIG How-To videos on our YouTube Channel
Read our Newsletter & Digits gardening info on our website www.durhamdigs.ca
Ask your question at info@durhamdigs.ca or Facebook

DIG Durham Integrated Growers
FOR A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY
To Plant a Garden is to Plant the Future

Supported by TD Park People Grants, TD READY COMMITMENT, park people amis des parcs

WHAT'S YOUR STORY MORNING GLORY?

Calling all food growers!

(backyard, balcony, or community garden)

Virtual Photo Contest

A community-focused virtual event to celebrate growing food sustainably, and close to home!

June 18 - October 15, 2020
Open to all community food growers in Durham Region
One \$100 gift card and DIG Store comfort t-shirt prize awarded per theme

Theme Winners selected by most votes
One Winner per theme
One person/family can only win once
Winners posted October 31, 2020 on www.durhamdigs.ca
See contest details and prizes at www.durhamdigs.ca/contest

How to Participate
Upload your food-growing photos according to 4 themes we have proposed at www.durhamdigs.ca/contest

- Pollinator pals
- Rooting for root veggies
- Climbing the walls! and trellises
- A splash of colour

DIG reserves the right to share any submitted photos on our website, social media platforms, and in other promotions and reporting.

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Agri-heros

There is a link on our website, under Resources ~

How to (safely) get local fruits and veggies in Oshawa, Whitby and Clarington.

Also ~

www.investdurham.ca/localfood

has a lot of info on where to find local food in Durham Region right now.

Have you checked out our YouTube channel yet?

Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, DIG board members Adrian and Brandon have begun adding monthly videos to our YouTube channel ~

www.youtube.com/user/DurhamDigs

Our focus has been on creating content for novice and veteran backyard gardeners.

For instance, Brandon, a graduate of Durham College's Horticulture Technician program, has created videos for gardeners looking to learn more about soilless mixes, testing soil with a simple jar test, as well as how to harden off plants before transplanting, and what to sow in early spring.

Adrian's background in Ethnobotany has led him to creating a series of wild edibles videos,



including identification, uses, and folklore. He also made a how-to video on edible sprouts, which should be in every gardener's repertoire, since starting homegrown sprouts is easy, affordable, and highly nutritious. Both topics will help any urban gardener feel some measure of food security in the midst of these uncertain times.

We have a full slate of videos planned, including *Yoga in the Garden*, *Growing store-bought ginger and turmeric*, *Small-space/balcony gardening*, *Edible flowers*, *Pests and how to repel them*, *Growing up with trellises*, and *Water retention & mulching*. Subscribe to our channel to stay up to date, and consider liking and sharing our content. We look at all comments we receive, and love receiving video suggestion ideas from our fans.

If you want to see more than videos, DIG has a page on its website ~

www.durhamdigs.ca/memberresources

which includes a members only section where you can view the documentary, *The Need to GROW*, as well as access the **Impact Kit**, which includes 15 video classes, including an important topic on how to compost, and how to grow soil. We have also released DigBits, short but pertinent one pagers from past newsletters on topics like canning produce, growing garlic, and more.

We greatly appreciate your support of DIG. To renew your membership, or to make a donation, please visit ~

www.durhamdigs.ca

Gardens, Essentially

Community and allotment gardeners have always known it. Gardens are essential!

An announcement Saturday morning April 25, 2020, confirmed it! Ontario declared community and allotment gardens on public and private lands essential.

It was the culmination of hours of work by those individuals and organizations, DIG among them, involved with community/allotment gardens meeting virtually for several weeks, developing guidelines, and signing petitions. DIG worked closely with the Food Communities Network's (Canada), Community Food Production group and the Ontario Community Growers Network and brought that knowledge and action back to Durham.

Being declared essential however, came with a particular stipulation. Local Health Departments had to develop guidelines for the safe operation of community/allotment gardens during COVID-19 before gardens could be opened. DIG was able to connect quickly with Durham's Medical Officer of Health through MP Lorne Coe. The quick response by Health Protection in developing and distributing these guidelines by the Tuesday following the announcement meant Durham Region guidelines were one of the first sets completed.

Through this, DIG has established a working relationship with Health Protection in relation to the guidelines, representing Durham gardens and supporting gardens to navigate this new way of doing gardening during COVID-19. We are grateful to the encouragement of MP Ryan Turnbull in being able to support gardens.

Community gardens and allotment garden leadership need to be congratulated for how quickly and effectively they were able to implement the Health Protection guidelines. Our virtual meeting with Durham garden representatives carefully reviewing the guidelines and inspiring each other will be something we repeat in the future. DIG brought the questions resulting from our discussions to the Health Protection Senior Inspector we liaise with, the feedback informing garden actions.

Navigating COVID-19 has brought gardens together in ways that could not and were not happening previously. Gardens, garden leadership and gardeners have demonstrated just how resilient they are; a resiliency they share their communities.

At a time when the number of people who are food insecure is continuing to grow community and allotment gardens will always be essential.



GardenTip

Gardening with Reduced Water

Water is essential

Too much is as bad as too little. It is troubling when gardeners water their plots daily. Just because the surface looks dry, doesn't mean that there isn't water below. Apart from wasting water and time, gardeners usually reduce productivity too.

Plants need water, as well as sunlight, carbon dioxide and soil nutrients to grow. Once established, most plants will nicely draw in necessary water (except in desert conditions). Water is needed for tissue growth, maintenance, and photosynthesis. Leaves are constantly losing moisture to the environment, so roots do the job of replacing this water.

Here are some tips that may reduce anxiety about your plants being thirsty.

Environmental factors

There are three main factors that are critical to managing your plants' water demands. They are **soil, sunlight, and wind**.

Ideal gardening soil retains moisture. Whereas clay is composed of tiny particles and holds moisture well, it can reduce oxygen availability. Soils composed of larger particles like silt, sand and gravel, are less able to hold water but provide good oxygen circulation. The ideal soil is between these two extremes. For less than ideal soils, the solutions are similar. Adding organic matter, like compost, opens and aerates clay soils while increasing water retention of sandy soils. Organic matter also improves nutrient levels and encourages soil organisms that contribute to better plant growth.

Sunlight, essential for growth, also heats and dries out the soil. As light levels rise, so do water demands because of increased photosynthesis, transpiration (water loss from leaves), and growth. Shade decreases all of those effects, but many vegetables need higher light to thrive. Walls, fences, and reflective surfaces can intensify the effects of sunlight.

Wind increases the water loss from plants and soil surfaces.



Good practices for reducing water usage.

Plant choices determine water demand. Large soft leaves, like melons, lose greater amounts of water. These plants will often wilt midday as water absorption cannot keep up with water loss. Wilting is a normal response and allows plants to moderate their water demand. However, repeated wilting can harm growth. Watering is a temporary fix, so consider longer term solutions. Plants with tap roots, like carrots, or narrow and stiff leaves, like onions, tolerate drier conditions better.

Soil amendment is one of the most effective ways of sustaining water availability. Adding organic matter, compost, worm castings, and leaves, increases the ability of the soil to retain moisture. These materials will become depleted over time; add continuously.

Planting procedures can help.

- Spring and early fall, have cooler temperatures which allow young plants to establish without the stress of excess heat.
- Transplanting on cloudy days, especially when rain is imminent, reduces shock to seedlings.
- Loosening tightly compacted roots on cell pack seedlings allows them to seek outwardly, establishing a bigger root system.
- Placing some organic matter and water in the bottom of holes ensures greater success for transplants.
- Spacing plants at optimum separation reduces competition for water, while maximizing soil shading.
- For large seeds, soak them in water for 6-10 hours, before planting. This increases

germination speed, as they do not need to slowly gain water from the soil.

- When planting smaller seeds, like beets, water the bottom of the trench, add seeds, then cover and firm down the soil.
- For very small seeds, like carrots and lettuce, sow them on the surface, pat them down lightly, moisten the soil, cover the area with an opaque cover for about a week. Inspect and uncover once germination has started.

Mulching between rows reduces soil temperature and reduces moisture evaporation. Eventually, mulch will decay into the soil adding organic matter.

To plant, you just pull the mulch aside. Large plants can be mulched around, while seedlings may need some time to grow before mulching

Best watering practices

Wetting the soil surface by sprinkling a teasing amount of water encourages shallow root systems, and the surface will dry out quickly. Also, watering in this way can have a wicking effect that draws water upward, to be evaporated. Strive to keep the water *below the surface*, so that roots penetrate downward. Encourage plants to struggle a little on their own to develop a deeper and more extensive root system. This tough love develops resilience. If there is a prolonged dry spell, water early in the morning or late in the evening, and ensure that you thoroughly soak the ground to a depth of several centimeters, where it will last.

May this information contribute to you becoming a more successful gardener, ... with less water.

For the original, unabridged version of this article, see the DigBit on our website.

Lavender in the school garden

This season's school gardening article is all about lavender, everyone's favourite calming herb. Although one of the more challenging plants to grow successfully, the benefits of having lavender in your school garden by far outweigh the drawbacks.

Think of it this way; once lavender is established, it will perform well for years to come if you can meet the plant's basic needs. One such requirement is soil. According to HGTV.ca, lavender thrives in well-drained soil with good airflow, and a neutral to alkaline pH. The best way to ensure your lavender plants' health is to put them in a raised bed. In this way, you can easily amend the soil.

Since lavender is native to the Mediterranean, it is adapted to dry conditions. This in itself is a great lesson for young gardeners; that most plants die from too much water rather than not enough. Since school is not in session during summer months, generally no one is around to take care of plants, which is A-Ok for lavender. The less disturbance, the better.

So which of the known 47 species of lavender should you grow with kids? The English lavender is most common, and performs well

in our climate. It also happens to be fragrant, medicinal, culinary, and beautiful to boot.

Durham Region is blessed to have Lavender Blu Farm within striking distance in Seagrave. While COVID-19 has made drop-in visits a no-go, you can visit by appointment only, and purchase seedlings for \$3 each.

www.lavender-blu.com/lavender.html or call **905-922-6983** for more information.

Teachers are starting to get behind lavender. Victoria Jaspers-Fayer, teacher and garden club lead at Maple Ridge Public School in Pickering, is one such teacher. At Victoria's school, the students learn how to properly harvest lavender in the autumn, and then they dry it. In December, when garden club is winding down, they gather to sew scrap fabric from old clothing into little sachets, which they fill with the dried lavender flowers. Students either keep them for themselves, or give them as gifts to teachers or their parents.

Although Victoria does not necessarily make the lavender-filled pouches for the purpose of an anti-anxiety remedy, they do discuss the calming benefits of lavender while doing the project.

Recipe

Lavender shortbread cookies

Ingredients

2 tsp dried lavender

3/4 pound salted butter at room temperature

1 cup sugar

1 tsp vanilla extract

3 1/2 cups all purpose flour

Grind the lavender up very finely using a mortar and pestle, until it is almost a powder. (Or chop the dried lavender as finely as possible with a knife; or bash it with a rolling pin.)

Whip together the butter, lavender, and sugar until combined. Mix in the vanilla.

Add flour and mix until a ball forms. If you use a hand mixer you'll need to do more kneading and shaping at the end.

Roll the dough out on a baking mat about 1/2" thick, then cut desired shapes. Squares, rectangles, and circles all work well.

Place the cookies on a tray and refrigerate for 1 hour until cold and firm to the touch.

Preheat oven to 350F. Bake the cookies for 20-25 minutes, until the edges are lightly golden brown.

Let the cookies cool to room temperature, and enjoy!



GardenART

Recycle old, broken chairs to make blooming masterpieces!



Garden plots available

Whitby Ajax Garden Project (WAGP) has a few plots. Contact this garden via the DIG website. Be prepared – Membership at WAGP includes a generous commitment to helping with the Food Bank plots.

There may be available plots in other gardens as well.

DigThis!

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