

# Dig This!

Spring 2025

## New Season, New Growth—Let's Dig In!



### Victory for Farmland & Conservation Pickering Lands Airport Threat Ends

Great news for those who value farmland, natural spaces, and responsible urban planning! Transport Minister Anita Anand has officially ended the decades-long threat of an airport on the Pickering Lands—a 75 km<sup>2</sup> area of Class 1 agricultural land.

Originally expropriated in 1972, the land has been leased to farmers and residents for decades. With food insecurity on the rise, protecting this fertile land for sustainable agriculture is more critical than ever.

Land Over Landings, a non-profit advocating for its preservation, has been at the forefront of this fight since the 1970s. Past Chair Mary Delaney credits the movement's longevity to generations of dedicated advocates:

"We stand on the shoulders of giants. Now it's up to the next generations to see it through!" - Mary Delaney, Past Chair

A January 27, 2025, press release announced that most of the land will be transferred to Parks Canada.

What Comes Next?

According to Alexis Whalen, current Chair of Land Over Landings, an Indigenous-led consultation with the Rouge National Urban Park First Nations Circle is now underway. This will be followed by community stakeholder discussions to determine the future use and stewardship of these vital lands.

DIG will continue to track developments and share updates. Learn more at [landoverlandings.com](http://landoverlandings.com)



### Exciting Events are Sprouting Up!

#### Making Mini Forest Screening - Regent Theatre

Don't miss the Making Mini Forests screening at the Regent Theatre this **March 23rd at 2pm!** Learn about the benefits of mini forest ecosystems and be inspired. Get your tickets today! <http://regenttheatre.ca>

#### Iris Art Gallery Show - Port Perry Library

Celebrate local talent at our Free Art Show at the Port Perry Library this **April 5th to May 1st**. Opening Reception April 5th at 2pm! Enjoy amazing works that connect art with nature!

#### DIG Annual Garden Tour

Join us for our Annual DIG Garden Tour on **July 19th!** Explore beautiful gardens and gather inspiration for your own. **Stay tuned for more details on the tour—we can't wait to see you there!**

### Did you know?

DIG has published two free gardening guides, available as PDFs on our website!



Starting a Vegetable Garden at Home: A Beginner's Guide – The perfect resource for new gardeners.



Field Guide to Common Garden Pests and Diseases – Identify and manage common garden challenges.

**Download your copies today at [durhamdigs.ca/resources](http://durhamdigs.ca/resources) and dig into gardening success!**

While you're there, check out our YouTube channel for more gardening tips and inspiration! [www.youtube.com/@DurhamDigs](http://www.youtube.com/@DurhamDigs)

## Agri-Hero

### Open Skies Farm

Founded by husband and wife team, Scott Reilly and Heather Geissberger Reilly, they practice farm to table, and offer a range of seasonal fruits and vegetables, such as snap and snow peas, onions, lettuce, spinach, rhubarb, 8 varieties of garlic, heirloom tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, winter squash (such as pumpkins), Swiss chard, potatoes, and beans. In June, pick up some strawberries; in July raspberries are in season; in August beautiful blackberries hit the shelves, while in September, grapes come to bear fruit.

Also available for sale are free range eggs from happy and healthy hens, who you can catch a glimpse of as they forage for insects in their coop (\$6/ dozen).

If you are a fan of homemade



preserves, stop in for jellies (like red pepper jelly), jams (like Mandarin Ginger Marmalade), and salsas and pickled serranos, prices starting at \$7/250 mL jar.

Each morning, Heather sets out an assortment of fresh baked goods including brownies, blondies, muffins, loaves, cookies and cream scones, at \$8/package. Order ahead of time if you

want something particular!

As Open Skies Farm works with mother nature, products are only available as the weather permits, and thus it is a smart idea to call (or text) ahead of time if you are after something specific.

Located at 8240 Enfield Road, Clarington, why not pair your visit with a stop in at Gallery On The Farm (our Autumn 2021 Agri Hero). The Open Skies Farm store is open Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. June until Thanksgiving. For more information, visit <http://www.openskiesfarm.com> or call (289) 685-2080.



## Woodpeckers Nature's Ecological Architects

It's been a cold, snowy, and blustery winter here in southern Ontario, harkening back to winters of yesteryear. As the sun's rays become more concentrated over this part of the globe, we welcome back our fine feathered friends from afar (see past articles on swallows and red-winged blackbirds, Spring 2023 & 2024).

Some intrepid avian acrobats never left, and shivered right on through wintertime. These common birds, including black capped chickadees, blue jays and their cousins, crows, cardinals, Canadian geese, mallards, and sparrows, stuck it out, foraging for dried up seeds, berries, and feeder food. Others, such as our native woodpeckers, used their own unique talents to eke out an existence all season long.

We are blessed to have 9 colourful species of the family Picidae, including the American Three-toed, the Black-backed, the Downy, the Hairy, the Northern Flicker, the Pileated, the Red-bellied, the Red-headed, and the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, each as unique as its name. The Red-headed and Red-bellied are found only in South

western Ontario, while the Yellow-bellied is migratory, returning only when spa begins to flow in the xylem tissue of trees, such as their favoured maple and birch.

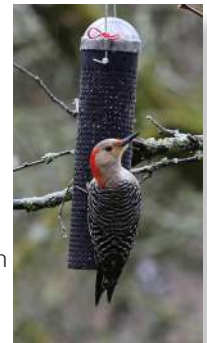
The Black-backed woodpecker can be found in areas that have recently burned due to forest fire. They swiftly move in and feast on wood-boring insects, remaining for over 5 years! One of our most common, Downy woodpeckers inhabit suburban parks, backyards, cemeteries, and are commonly mistaken for their cousin, the Hairy woodpecker, who inhabit the same environments.

Most people of the Boomer and Gen-X eras will recognize the handsome Pileated woodpecker, based on the popular comic/cartoon, "Woody Woodpecker", complete with mischievous laugh. The largest of all native woodpeckers, these beauties reach a jaw-dropping 48 cm in length, with a wingspan of 76 cm! Imagine all of the wood-boring beetles and termites needed to sustain their metabolism.

All woodpeckers play a vital role in

detering invasive pest species such as the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

According to one study by the U.S. Forest Service, woodpeckers were deemed effective predators, and preferentially prey on EABs as they devastate native ash trees. To encourage more woodpeckers in your backyard



or neighbourhood, consider leaving dead trees standing when safe to do so. If you notice large holes in the trunk, what you are looking at are nesting holes, which are made according to the size of the bird, and are usually arranged vertically. When you see smaller, horizontal marks in rows, these are called foraging holes. Woodpeckers naturally offer us an essential ecosystem service, and are an entertaining way to engage with our world around us!

Photo courtesy of Marina Parisi

## Seed Spotlight ABCs of seeds cont.

From N to Z, Unlock the Potential of Your Garden's Growth!

### N is for Napoli Carrot (Nantes)

Napoli carrot is an early-maturing (as a baby carrot) or full-size, 7" long taproot good for storage. It is great for both spring and fall plantings, becoming sweet after frost as they convert starches into sugars as a kind of carrot antifreeze. It's also excellent for overwintering in cold climates like ours. A favourite of regenerative ag guru Eliot Coleman. Get them from William Dam Seeds.



### O is for Oregon Sugar Pod snow peas

This variety of pea has little to no string, and are crisp pods with crunchy sweet peas. Since you can eat the entire pod, they make easy snacks! What makes this pea worth taking notice of is its reputed resistance to powdery mildew, mosaic virus and common wilt. No staking required as they are bush peas, and only 36 to 48 inches (90 -120 cm) tall. Get them from Veseys.



### P is for Purple Magic Potatoes

This smooth-skinned purple potato has a unique white ring on the inside. Purple Magic grows high yields of medium to large sized kidney shaped potatoes. Excellent for oven roasting, frying, baking! Long a staple of Andean culture, this potato features heavily in Bolivian dishes such as salteñas (an empanada with a juicy filling - a kind of sauce that remains inside the dough), stews, soups, Papas a la Huancaína (with a spicy cheese sauce, how delicious! Available for pre-order in April from Homedepot.ca



See <https://www.durhamdigs.ca/newsletters/> for last season's list of seeds.

### Q is for Queensland Blue Pumpkins

The Queensland Blue Pumpkin is an heirloom variety that originated in Australia in 1932. It is known for its striking blue, flattened, and highly ribbed appearance, with pumpkins averaging 10-20 pounds each. The flesh is golden and very sweet, with a flavor that lasts for months in storage. For planting in Ontario, it is recommended to sow the seeds directly in the desired growing position when the soil warms up in late spring, as they don't like to be transplanted/disturbed. With an epic 110-130 days to maturity, these rare and unusual pumpkins are worth it! Get them from Stems Flower Farm (Cookstown, On.)



### R is for Rutabaga (Helenor Coated Organic)

Also known as a Swede (apparently!), these root veggies take 90 days to mature, and will keep your cellar stocked for winter - it's never too early to plan ahead. Grow rutabaga so you can entertain guests by serving the Scottish classic "neeps and tatties". Get them from West Coast Seeds.



### S is for Sea Buckthorn (Hippophae rhamnoides)

In August 2019, DIG went on an excursion to a food forest created by Keith St. John, of Cobourg, Ontario. Whilst on tour, Keith introduced us to Sea Buckthorn, and sang its praises, including its ability to fix nitrogen, to grow in the harshest conditions (survives down to -40°C), and packed with vitamins A, E, plus omega fatty acids (even the rare omega-7), and has 30 times more vitamin C than oranges! Get them from The Incredible Seed Co.



### T is for Tiara

This quick growing cabbage can be grown in either spring or autumn, and holds well without splitting. The plant is compact; perfect for community/allotment gardens. The heads mature after 60 or so days, and form 0.5 kg to 1 kg (1-2 lbs) heads that are dense, crunchy, and with a small core. Perfect for coleslaw or cabbage rolls. Get them from West Coast Seeds.



### W is for Winter Radish

That's right, you can enjoy the peppery taste of Ostergruss Rosa Organic winter radish all through the winter with this delectable variety. Somehow, this plant has been bred to be suitable for open field or greenhouse production into the winter. It takes 60-70 days to mature into a Medium-long 15 cm (6-8") root. It even stores well after harvest. Get it from William Dam Seeds.



### X is for Xanthos

Yes, there is even a seed variety beginning with this most unused letter. Xanthos means "Yellow" in Greek, a unique colour for cosmos. The 3" soft yellow petals flower on this dwarf, uniform plant, branching 2 feet wide, and can be grown in pots, thriving all summer. One of the easiest and most popular direct seed annuals, which make a great cut flower bouquet. Get them from Veseys.



### Y is for Yukina Savoy

Tatsoi - Yukina Savoy is a fast growing member of the Brassica family, maturing in 43 days (or 20, if you want baby greens). The crinkled texture of the leaves (which is what "savoy" means) helps trap dressings and seasonings, making them great for cooking and salads. Sow in early spring for a burst of flavour early in the season, and again in the autumn, as it is slow to bolt. Get them from The Incredible Seed Co.



### Z is for Zebrune

Zebrune, also known as Banana shallots, are good storing bulbs (sweetness improves in storage) with pinkish brown skins over crisp white interiors that are mild and sweet for gourmet cooking. Start the seeds indoors early in the year and transplant in early spring, as they take 100 days to mature. Get them from West Coast Seeds.



## Grow Your Own Superberry

### Starting Sea Buckthorn from Seed!

Looking for a rewarding challenge? Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) is a hardy, nutrient-packed shrub known for its bright orange berries, rich in vitamins and antioxidants. But starting this plant from seed? Not for the faint of heart!

#### Scarification:

Gently scratch the seed surface with sandpaper.

#### Soak:

Let the seeds sit in water for 24 hours.

#### Post-Stratification:

Plant ¼" deep in a peat/perlite mix and maintain alternating soil temperatures—30°C (day) / 20°C (night).

#### Germination Time:

Even with all this fussing, expect to wait 21-30 days for sprouts!

#### Important Note:

Sea Buckthorn is dioecious, meaning you'll need both male and female plants for fruit production. But as they say, "Good things come to those who wait!"

Have you grown Sea Buckthorn before? Share your experience with us!



## Budget-Friendly Garden Essentials

### Top Budget-Friendly Garden Finds

Gardening doesn't have to be expensive! You can find high-quality gardening essentials at Dollarama and Giant Tiger—often the same quality as big garden centers, but for a fraction of the price.

**Seeds** – Affordable and just as reliable as name-brand varieties

**Gardening Gloves** – Durable and protective for all your garden tasks



#### Planters & Pots

– Stylish options without the high price tag

**Hand Tools** – Trowels, pruners, and rakes that get the job done



**Trellises & Plant Supports** – Perfect for climbing plants and sturdy growth

**Watering Cans & Sprayers** – Keep your plants hydrated without overspending



### Let us know!

What's your favorite budget gardening find? Let us know where you shop and what must-have item you've scored at Dollarama, Giant Tiger or another go-to store!

## Recipe



### Strawberry Spinach Salad

Welcome spring! This fresh and vibrant salad is versatile - mix and match ingredients to create your perfect combination.

#### Ingredients

4 cups (1L) spinach or mixed greens (stems removed, torn)

1 cup (250mL) fresh strawberries, peaches, blueberries, kiwi, or a combination

#### Choose Your Toppings:

2 green onions, chopped

1 small red onion, thinly sliced

1 clove garlic, minced

½ cup (125mL) asparagus, blanched & chilled

2 tbsp sunflower seeds, toasted

½ cup (125mL) bacon, cooked & crumbled

½ cup (125mL) walnuts or slivered almonds, toasted

½ cup (125mL) salted peanuts

½ cup (125mL) shredded cheese

1 tsp grated lemon or orange peel

1 cup (250mL) cooked turkey, chopped

#### Directions:

Combine greens, fruit, and toppings in a large bowl. Pour half of your chosen dressing over the salad just before serving. Add more as needed. Refrigerate leftover dressing.

#### Salad Dressings

Two-Seed Dressing:

¼ cup (60mL) sugar or honey

2 tbsp sesame seeds

1 tbsp poppy seeds

¼ cup (60mL) cider or balsamic vinegar

¼ cup (60mL) olive oil

1/8 tsp Worcestershire sauce

¼ tsp paprika

Salt & pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid. Shake well before serving.

#### Rhubarb Dressing:

2 cups (500mL) rhubarb, chopped

½ cup (125mL) sugar

¼ cup (60mL) vinegar

¾ cup (175mL) oil

2-3 tbsp onion, grated

1½ tsp Worcestershire sauce

¼ tsp salt

Cook rhubarb, sugar, and vinegar over medium heat until soft. Strain and discard pulp. Add 6 tbsp of the strained juice to the remaining ingredients. Shake in a jar or whisk together.

Chill for at least 1 hour before serving.

Find the full recipe and more in:

Simply in Season by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert.

## Dig This!

A quarterly publication of Durham Integrated Growers

Editor	Mary Drummond
Contributors	Adrian Hogendoorn Karlee Hooper Ruth Latimer
Layout	Latimer Graphics / Karlee
WEBSITE	<a href="http://www.durhamdigs.ca">www.durhamdigs.ca</a>
EMAIL	<a href="mailto:info@durhamdigs.ca">info@durhamdigs.ca</a>
FACEBOOK	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/DurhamDIGs">www.facebook.com/DurhamDIGs</a>
TWITTER	<a href="https://twitter.com/durhamdigs">twitter.com/durhamdigs</a>
INSTAGRAM	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/durhamdigs">Instagram- @durhamdigs</a>
YOUTUBE	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/DurhamDIGs">www.youtube.com/user/DurhamDIGs</a>