

Dig This!

Summer 2025

Longer days, greener gardens—let's get growing together!



Annual General Meeting

On Thursday, March 20, 2025, DIG members gathered for our Annual General Meeting (AGM). The annual seed swap, conversations and delicious treats set the tone for a great gathering of garden members.

Before we kicked off the meeting, as per tradition, we listened to a keynote speaker. We strive to choose interesting individuals who are making difference in our community, and Derrik Stevenson from Mighty Harvest is no exception, and is this season's Agri-Hero!



Be sure to join us for next year's AGM in March 2026 to hear from fascinating people from in and around Durham Region!

Agri-Hero

Mighty Harvest Fresh



Greens - Local Impact

With Locations in Ajax and Oshawa, Mighty Harvest is one of Durham Region's first vertical farms—growing fresh, sustainable produce right in the heart of the community. Founded in 2021, the farm uses innovative hydroponic technology to cultivate leafy greens, herbs, and microgreens indoors, year-round. By eliminating the need for soil and using 90% less water than traditional farming, Mighty Harvest delivers pesticide-free produce with a minimal environmental footprint.

Each week, restaurants and homes across Toronto, York, and Durham Region receive freshly harvested greens, ensuring peak flavour and nutritional value. Orders are harvested to order, stored at food-safe temperatures, and delivered with care—bringing local, sustainable food to plates across the GTA.

But Mighty Harvest is about more than just great produce. Through a new partnership with Feed the Need in Durham, the farm is growing fresh lettuce weekly to help provide healthy food to those experiencing food insecurity. This initiative is supported by a Seed grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and is part of a larger effort to harness vertical farming as a sustainable, community-driven solution to hunger.

With its focus on freshness, sustainability, and giving back, Mighty Harvest is growing more than just greens—it's growing a better future for Durham Region.

Learn more or order online at mightyharvest.ca. Find us on Facebook and Instagram under the handle [mightyharvestproduce](https://www.instagram.com/mightyharvestproduce).





DIG at Work...

The You Grow Durham Fund (YGDF), offered by Durham Integrated Growers (DIG), helps community gardens across Durham Region grow and thrive. By funding essential projects—like building sheds, expanding plots, and improving accessibility—this initiative supports long-term sustainability and community connection. Thanks to DIG's support, gardens are better equipped to serve their members and the neighbourhoods they nourish. Here's how the fund is making a difference this season.



Civic Recreation Community Garden - Whitby

This new garden start-up is growing fresh roots in Whitby with support from DIG's You Grow Durham Fund and the community. The Civic Recreation site is transforming into a welcoming space for community members to connect, grow food and learn together.



Mary Street Community Garden - Oshawa

After years of waiting, Mary St Community Garden finally has the brand new shed they dreamed of. Thanks to the You Grow Durham Fund matching donations the gardeners now have a secure, accessible storage to support their growing space and ongoing community efforts.



Port Perry Care and Share Garden – Scugog

With support from the You Grow Durham Fund - and help from member fundraising - Port Perry Care and Share Garden was able to build a new shed larger than what was planned. This shared space offers secure storage and support the garden's continued growth and community collaboration.



Glen Street Community Garden – Oshawa

This season brought a fresh new look to Glen Street Community Garden! With support from the You Grow Durham Fund, the team rebuilt their aging raised beds and added clean, defined edges to their ground plots—making the space more functional and inviting for everyone.

Be the reason a garden grows!

Your support helps new gardens take root and gives existing ones the boost they need to bloom with possibility.

Donate today at www.durhamdigs.ca – every dollar sows seeds of change!

Squash Bugs

Tiny pests, Big problems

With the growing season in full swing, many of our precious organic, no-spray vegetables are crawling with insects – some beneficial, others detrimental!



One such PEST is the dreaded squash bug (*Anasa tristis*)! Though inconspicuously earthy brown-grey, these bugs pack a destructive punch toward all members of the Cucurbitaceae family, also known as the gourd family. They especially prefer *Cucurbita pepo* types, including zucchini, yellow squash, ornamental pumpkins, and acorn squash. Hard-shelled *Cucurbita moschata* (e.g., butternut squash) and *Cucurbita maxima* (e.g., Hubbard, kabocha) are often more resistant.

According to **DIG's online Field Guide to Common Garden Pests and Diseases**, you can identify squash bugs as follows:

- Bullet-shaped eggs in small clusters on leaf undersides, turning reddish as they mature
- Nymphs have pear-shaped, pearly gray bodies with darker legs and antennae
- Adults are flattened, tear-shaped, brownish-gray with yellow-to-orange markings



The damage these pests cause, if left unchecked, is extensive. Adults and nymphs suck nutrients from leaves and disrupt water flow. Plants may appear wilted, even when watered. Adults feed on fruits late in the season, spoiling good zucchinis! Young seedlings may be killed outright, while mature plants will have reduced yields, with leaves and vines browning to dust.

To reduce squash bugs, consider planting vining squash and melons and training them up trellises. Clear debris and mulch around plant bases where squash bugs hide. Place wood planks, shingles, or newspapers between rows to trap bugs. In the early morning, flip traps and kill the bugs or drop them in soapy water. Hand-picking eggs, nymphs, and adults is most effective – though time consuming and not for the squeamish!

Other control methods include introducing predators like tachinid flies and parasitic wasps. Neem oil can disrupt squash bug development. Pyrethrin is effective but harms beneficial insects. Diatomaceous earth – a powder made from fossilized algae – can cut into their bodies and dehydrate them. Sounds gruesome!

Support local: pick up diatomaceous earth at Durham Farmers' County Co-Op, 5968 Co-op Road, Orono.

Blueberries

pH Makes the Pick!

One of the most challenging fruit crops to grow successfully (in our opinion).



The secret to success: it's all about the soil!

Blueberries require acidic soil. Here in Durham Region, our soil is mostly alkaline to slightly acidic, with pH values from 6.0 to 7.5, thanks to a lime-rich base. Blueberries need soil with a pH of 4.5 to 5.5. If the soil is too "sweet" (alkaline), roots can't absorb nutrients properly and won't grow well.

The first step in growing sweet, delicious berries is planning! Begin acidifying your soil months in advance by adding elemental sulfur, peat moss, or pine needles.

Choose a Northern Highbush variety (Northland, Bluecrop, Legacy) and plant it in full sun, with well-drained soil (they're prone to root rot) and protected from wind—think of them as babies!

Blueberries are space hogs and need to be about 1 metre (3–4 feet) from other plants. Add a thick layer of wood chips, sawdust, or pine needles as mulch. Incredibly, they need 10–20 liters of water per bush per day until early September. Wow!

Pruning isn't necessary until year 4 or 5 and is just to remove dead, broken, or diseased branches. Aim to keep 12–16 canes per bush. Fertilizer is not required.

Enjoy your antioxidant-rich, home-grown blueberries!



Have you heard?

Bill 5



On April 17, 2025, the provincial government introduced the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, 2025 (Bill 5). Its stated aim is to "stimulate economic growth by reducing regulatory barriers in sectors like mining, infrastructure, and housing" (The Narwhal).

According to The Narwhal, Bill 5 would replace the Endangered Species Act (2007) with a new Species Conservation Act, shifting decision-making from scientific bodies to the provincial cabinet—potentially allowing economic interests to influence species protection.

The bill also exempts certain projects from environmental assessments, which the government claims are outdated and delay development. To accelerate housing, it proposes creating Special Economic Zones (SEZs) where some provincial and municipal laws can be suspended.

More than 100 organizations have voiced strong opposition, calling the bill a major rollback of environmental protections and a threat to biodiversity, farmland, and Indigenous rights. It redefines "habitat" to include only nests or dens, excluding critical areas for feeding, mating, and migration (Wabakimi). This could increase habitat loss and put more pressure on vulnerable species like Blanding's Turtle and Tri-colored Bat (found in Rouge National Urban Park), and Redside Dace (found in Duffins and Carruthers Creeks), according to Environmental Defence.

Bill 5 passed its third reading in the Ontario legislature on June 4, 2025, and was enacted as Chapter 4 of the Statutes of Ontario. It is not yet in force. Amendments aren't expected until the fall, as the legislature has adjourned for summer.

To learn more or send a letter of support, visit Environmental Defence.

You can also sign a joint letter from 100 organizations opposing Bill 5, provided by Ontario Nature.

<https://act.environmentaldefence.ca/page/170384/action/1>
<https://ontarionature.org>



GardenTip

Trellising

Trellising squash, zucchini, melons, and similar vining (not bush) crops can dramatically improve air circulation, reduce disease pressure (like powdery mildew) due to increased airflow. Trellising also deters pests (especially squash bugs...less hiding spots), and increases yields by promoting more manageable growth and sun exposure on the leaves. Win, win, win!

With a little planning and foresight, you can take advantage of this space-saving technique and grow up instead of out, while having less of your precious fruits rot on the ground and go to the compost heap. There are plenty of trellising methods too—like wall-style netting between posts—so choose what works best for your space and crops.

Materials:

- Sturdy T-posts, wooden stakes, or a fence panel
- Trellis material: cattle panels, nylon netting, garden twine
- Clips, twist ties, or soft garden tie

Methods:

1. Simple A-Frame

Lean two panels together and screw them at the top for stability. Use slings (old t-shirts, nylons, or mesh bags) to support heavy fruit. The structure should be at least 1.5 m (5 ft) tall.

2. Wooden Teepee

Arrange long branches in a circle, drive them into the ground, and lean them inward. Bind the tops with twine, then wrap twine around the frame to create sturdy climbing support. Great for peas and tomatoes.



Turtles

Ancient Allies, In Our Backyard

This season's nature spotlight is on turtles, ancient reptiles that have roamed the Earth for over 200

million years. Ontario is home to eight native freshwater species—the most in Canada! In

Durham Region, the most common is the Midland Painted Turtle, easily identified by its black shell, yellow underside, and red and yellow striped limbs. They're often spotted around ponds, marshes, and slow-moving rivers like Lynde, Duffins, and Bowmanville Creek.

Near home is a small population of Common Snapping Turtles, listed as a species of special concern in Ontario. These dinosaur-like reptiles are Canada's largest turtles—some weighing over 20 kg (44 lbs.)—and can live 50+ years in the wild. Snapping turtles bask less conspicuously than painted turtles, often choosing submerged logs or sunny shallows instead of open logs or rocks.

Sadly, 7 of Ontario's 8 native turtle species are at risk. According to Cottage Life, only 7 out of every 10,000 eggs survive to adulthood. Habitat loss, development, poaching, and vehicle collisions are major threats. Nesting season, from late May to early July, is when many turtles cross roads in search of nesting sites. Over 2,000 turtle road deaths were recorded in eastern Ontario between 2017 and 2024.

If you see a turtle crossing the road, gently move it in the direction it's heading. For snappers, avoid the front—slide a shovel or car mat under the rear and drag gently. If injured, contact the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre at 705-741-5000—Ontario's only turtle hospital.

Turtles benefit gardeners too! They eat pests like slugs and caterpillars, fertilize as they roam, and help maintain healthy aquatic ecosystems that support frogs, dragonflies, and birds.

Support turtles by maintaining wetland areas, adding backyard ponds, or providing sandy nesting spots. You can also order turtle crossing signs and nest protectors at ontarioturtle.ca/shop.



Recipe

Double Blueberry Shortcake

From Bakefest '99



Ingredients:

- 2¼ cups (550 ml) Five Roses Cake & Pastry Flour
- 3 tbsp (45 ml) granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) baking powder
- ½ tsp (2 ml) salt
- ⅓ cup (75 ml) cold butter, cubed
- ½ cup (125 ml) dried blueberries or currants
- ¾ cup (175 ml) milk
- 2 tsp (10 ml) brown sugar
- 1 cup (250 ml) whipping cream
- 2 cups (500 ml) blueberries, sweetened to taste (or leave unsweetened)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. Mix flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt. Cut in butter until crumbly. Stir in dried fruit.
3. Make a well, add milk, and stir with a fork until dough is soft and sticky.
4. Turn onto a lightly floured surface. Pat into a ¾-inch (2 cm) circle. Cut with a 2½-inch (6 cm) cutter. Re-roll scraps as needed.
5. Place on a buttered baking sheet. Sprinkle tops with brown sugar.
6. Bake 12–13 minutes. Broil 45 seconds until golden. Cool on a rack.
7. Whip cream until thick. Slice shortcakes and fill with cream and berries.

Makes 8 servings.

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