

Dig This!

Winter 2026

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What's on your gardening wish list? See page 1.

Check out the guest article from Durham College, on pages 4.

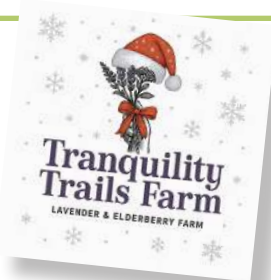


Agri-Hero

Tranquility Trails Farm

Located in North Pickering, this newly established, family-owned farm has become a favourite spot for lavender and elderberry lovers. Surrounded by peaceful fields, visitors can enjoy self-guided tours, a chic café, and wellness classes such as Pilates, yoga, and sound therapy.

The farm's mission is to offer a restorative space where the calming power of lavender and the healing benefits of elderberries



shine. As we noted in our Winter 2023 issue, elderberries are one of southern Ontario's top antiviral plants. Feeling a cold coming on? Elderberry syrup can help (Buhner's dosage: 2–4

tblsp every 2–4 hours). Tranquility Trails sells their own delicious syrup—made with raw honey, spices, and apple cider vinegar—for a modest price.

Dreaming of summer? Their café features lavender lemonade, elderberry drinks, artisan

ice cream (elderberry compote or lavender lemon), shortbreads, tarts, cookies, loafs, and delicate macaroons. Lavender season typically runs from late June to mid-July, with six varieties blooming at different times.

Find Tranquility Trails Farm at 5240 Lakeridge Rd, Pickering ON. Off-season hours are reduced (Saturdays, 11 am–3 pm); call or email ahead: 905-655-8111 or scott@tranquilitytrails.ca.

More information—

www.tranquilitytrails.ca

Instagram: [@tranquilitytrailsfarm](https://www.instagram.com/tranquilitytrailsfarm)

All I want for Christmas...

The DIG Board members are gardeners at heart. Between all the policy writing sessions and community-garden meetings, the five of us are still grounded in the soil of our backyards, balconies, plots, and fields.

Below is what we would like for this Christmas...

Santa are you reading this?

Mini Chiu wants **beans!** "I am learning to appreciate the humble bean. It's cool-tolerant and short seasoned; what's not to love." As well, the bean seeds look stunning! These beauties can be found at heritageharvestseed.com.

Mary Drummond stumbled upon a delectable **melon** called **Prescott Fond Blanc** from Beebeseeds.com This heirloom ribbed, warty, nearly pumpkin-shaped beauty is rose-orange in colour. The mature fruit tastes like a rich honey cantaloupe. Yes please!

Adrian

Hogendoorn asked Sinterklaas for **Tavor Organic Artichoke** from the Vessey's catalogue. Last season, his seedlings just did not want to thrive, despite a Mediterranean-

like summer. During the annual garden tour, he saw a perfect row of artichokes growing at The Field Community Garden. This is his Christmas wish!

Brandon Jaspers-Fayer also asked Sinterklaas for seeds - **buttercup**

squash! He loves butternut squash, but cutting it up can be difficult. Less so with this variety. Buttercup has thin skin, edible when cooked.

After a long growing season, you will be rewarded with a veggie of velvety texture and a slightly nutty, chestnut-like flavor. Westcoastseeds.com.

Another Board favourite is **Strawberry Blonde Marigold** seeds available at Burpee.com. No ordinary flower, this French marigold variety changes colour! "When warmer, blooms are yellow-pinks; when cooler: pink-plum tones kick in." These plants grow 8 to 10 inches, and make a perfect sun-splashed border or container plant.



Christmas
Wish List

Honoring a Life of Faith

Pastor Sam Martin Memorial Pollinator Garden

The community of Carriage Country Baptist Church (CCBC) and the wider Baptist fellowship were deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Dr. Sam Martin—a cherished Pastor, mentor, and friend—on June 16, 2024.

Dr. Martin's life was defined by dedication. Called to Canada from his native Scotland in 1977, he pastored Bayfair Baptist Church, founded the Safe Haven Worship Centre, and served faithfully as a member of CCBC. However, his profoundest legacy lies in his heart for global missions. In 1990, he established the Arms of Jesus Children's Mission. What began as a modest vision blossomed into an international outreach supporting over 1,500 sponsored children across Kenya, Haiti, and Guatemala. Because of this incredible record there was a growing sense within the church community that such service should be recognized.

Over a period of years, the large garden bed at the front of CCBC had fallen into disrepair. Overgrown with weeds, it had become not only an eyesore but a functional problem, actively threatening the church's east wall. In early 2024 a group of church volunteers cleared the area of overgrown shrubs thereby creating a space between the church wall and the back edge of the garden. This labour of love opened up the failing plot to new life as a tribute to one of our most respected leaders.

In July 2024, church leadership decided on the creation of a native plant-focused pollinator garden. This was inspired by a presentation on *Nurturing Biodiversity* by Sayeh Beheshti at the DIG Annual meeting in March of 2024, as well as the success of local community gardens. This vibrant, sustaining space would be named the **Pastor Sam Martin Memorial Pollinator Garden** to serve as a lasting tribute to his life of faith and service.

Planning for the 110-by-10-foot garden began in August 2024. Consultations with Native Plants in Claremont Inc. led to the selection of over 40 native pollinator plants and resulted in a detailed planting plan for the garden as a whole. It became very clear to the planners that planting the whole plot at one time would be a daunting task. Consequently, it was decided that a phased approach would offer the best opportunity for success: a three-year approach was agreed upon. The centre section was completed in 2024. The north and south sections were to be completed in subsequent years.

On September 21, a dedicated team of about ten volunteers completely cleared and prepped the entire plot in a single day, laying down a barrier and four inches of cedar mulch. Existing plants that survived the original purge earlier in the year and were healthy and met the design parameters of the new garden, were left.

Planting began a week later on September 28th, guided by local experts from Native



Plants in Claremont. At the end of the day the centre section was fully planted and the north and south sections partially filled with the surviving plants.

On a beautiful sunny, warm Sunday, October 5, 2024, Pastor David Bowler dedicated the garden in a ceremony attended by members of the Martin family, the Board of Directors of the Arms of Jesus Children's Mission, and the CCBC congregation. Brock Heard, Mission Director and grandson of Pastor Sam, spoke on behalf of the Mission and the Martin family, thanking all those who had made the Memorial Garden happen.

What began as a phased, three-year proposal was rapidly accelerated by love and collective effort. Driven by a shared sense of pride in creating a meaningful tribute, the community's enthusiasm did not stop after the first section was complete. Volunteers continued to nurture and populate the space. The entire garden was practically full by the summer of 2025—two years ahead of schedule. This remarkable achievement stands as a testament to the church family's enduring spirit and the valuable support received from the local gardening community,

This commitment to service and growth has inspired further action on the church property. We are thrilled to announce that approval has been secured to build a 20-foot square vegetable garden. This new initiative will supply fresh, nutritious produce to a local food bank: a tangible outreach to our immediate neighbours. Like the Memorial Garden, this project extends Dr. Martin's mission of selfless giving and actively nurturing life not only within our church, but also into the wider community.

We invite you to visit the Pastor Sam Martin Memorial Pollinator Garden—a living, growing memorial that perfectly captures the spirit of nurturing life, just as Pastor Sam Martin did throughout his extraordinary ministry.



Snow tracks

...Winter's secret handwriting

If you are into winter wonderland walks you've no doubt noticed the hand and footprints adorning a fresh blanket of snow. But what made those clandestine tracks, when the world was asleep, snug inside a nice toasty home?

If you have a bird feeder, or hike where conservation areas put out black oil sunflower seeds, you'll notice a track frenzy of songbirds and ground feeders, in the shape of tiny arrowhead impressions. The brave hearty sparrows, chickadees, black-eyed juncos, or mourning doves, with us all season long, are likely culprits. Look for pairs of tracks side-by-side.

In early dawn, check out the rabbit highways all around town. Rabbits leave two big hind prints ahead of two small front prints in a neat Y-shape, in mostly straight lines.

On the scent for rabbits are those wily coyotes and foxes. Weaving between outbuildings, or along trails you might see the straight-line march of a fox or coyote. You may also see a thick tail mark trailing behind. A sure clue you

are looking at traces of apex predators are scat clues; twisted, rope-like, often full of fur and bone fragments.

Another track to look for are made by white-tailed deer. You will see two heart-shaped cloven hooves, often tracing gentle arcs through orchards, hedgerows, or around compost piles. Missing limbs off shrubs and sapling trees are a tell-tale sign.

City-dwellers will be used to prints belonging to common neighbours. Raccoon tracks show up as small hand-like prints with long fingers. Squirrel prints look like a pair of small hands up front, big snowshoes behind and the classic 'hooked J' landing pattern.

Embracing the long, cold winter, begins by going outside and admiring the artwork that is all around us. Animals all leave their winter signatures behind. Step outside with curious eyes and let the tracks tell you who's been visiting while you slept. Snow doesn't just blanket our beautiful country, it reveals the secret life that's been humming beside you all along.

GardenTip



Growing Ginger

A ginger plant likes being indoors as long as you give it some humidity, warmth (20–25°C), and gentle morning light.

A wide clay pot is best as ginger grows sideways, not down. Fill that pot with loose soil, rich with compost that is reminiscent of a tropical forest floor. Water so that all soil is damp and draining well. Water again when the one inch surface is dry. Soak the rhizome in warm water for a day before planting.

If, at the grocery store, you select organically grown pieces of ginger with 'eyes' (like on potatoes) you can expect the following growth habits:

Sprouts in 3 to 6 weeks

Lush foliage by mid-spring (complete with a ginger tea aroma!)

Harvest after 8 to 10 months

Recipe

Gingerbread Cake

Ingredients

- 1/2 Cup shortening
- 1/2 Cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/2 Cup light molasses
- 1 1/2 Cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 3/4 tsp salt
- 3/4 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp ginger (if you like ginger, triple the amount)
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 Cup boiling water (best just off the boil)

Instructions

Cream shortening and sugar till light. Add egg and molasses, beat thoroughly. Sift together dry ingredients and add to creamed mixture alternately with the boiled water, beating after each addition. Bake in greased, lightly floured 8"x8"x2" pan at 350° for 35-40 minutes or until a wooden toothpick come out clean.

Serve warm simply with a bit of butter or a lemon sauce drizzled over a slice.

MassWildlife
Pocket Guide to MA Animal Tracks

<p>Track Pattern</p> <p>White-Tailed Deer 2 1/2" - 3"</p> <p>Dog 2 1/4" - 4"</p> <p>Red Fox H: 2" F: 2 1/4"</p> <p>Bob Cat 2"</p> <p>Otter: 3 1/4"</p> <p>Mink: 1 5/8"</p>	<p>Moose 4 1/2" - 5 1/2"</p> <p>Coyote H: 2 1/2" F: 2 1/2"</p> <p>Gray Fox H: 1 3/4" F: 1 1/2"</p> <p>House Cat 1 1/8"</p> <p>Fisher: 2 1/4"</p> <p>Weasel: 1/2" - 1"</p>
<p>Track Pattern</p> <p>Raccoon H: 4" F: 2 1/2"</p> <p>Porcupine H: 3" F: 2 1/2"</p> <p>Black Bear H: 7-9" F: 4 1/2"</p> <p>Woodchuck H: 2 1/4" F: 2"</p> <p>Showshoe Hare H: 5" F: 1 1/2"</p> <p>Gray Squirrel H: 2 1/4" F: 1 1/2"</p> <p>Crow: 2 1/2"</p>	<p>Striped Skunk H: 1 1/2" F: 1 1/2"</p> <p>Beaver H: 6" F: 3"</p> <p>Opossum H: 2" F: 1 3/4"</p> <p>Muskrat H: 1 1/2" F: 1"</p> <p>Coitontail Rabbit H: 4" F: 1"</p> <p>White-Footed Mouse H: 3/8" F: 1/4"</p> <p>Turkey: 4"</p> <p>Ruffed Grouse: 2"</p>

Tracks Not To Scale
Tracks will show considerable variation depending upon conditions of ground (snow, mud, dust, sand, etc.) and movement of animal.

F: Front Track
H: Hind Track
T: Tail marks may be present

Protect wildlife and its habitat: Support the Wildlands Fund.
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Field HQ
1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westboro, MA 01581
508.792.7270 • www.state.ma.us/dfwel/dfw

Guest article from Durham College

In the orchard: Applied learning and career readiness

By Jennifer Hoban (The Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture, Durham College)

Durham College and The Barrett Centre work together leveraging academics and work-integrated learning (WIL) programs. This provides students with a wide range of learning experiences that teach best practices for harvest, post-harvest and value-added food processing. This autumn's apple harvest is a great example of these principles in action.

In semester 3 of the Food and Farming Program, students take a *Harvest and Post-Harvest* course. They participate in lectures and labs that teach on-farm efficiencies and food safety, as well as quality and storage requirements about fruit and vegetable crops. One lab focuses on the optimal harvest time and methods for apples. In conjunction with the crowd favourite taste-test method, students learn the iodine starch test to determine if apples are ready for harvest. Students apply a solution of 4% potassium iodide and 1% iodine to the apples, observe the staining pattern that appears, and compare it to the standard Cornell Starch-Iodine Index. In the picture below, the staining pattern indicated that they weren't quite ready to be harvested and that they needed another week before coming in from the fields. When the apples are ready, students learn key harvest skills like picking, grading, and storing.

This season, Carlos, one of our WIL students played a key role in supporting the apple harvest. He described how working in the orchard provided the opportunity to practice efficient harvesting. It also has been supporting his mental well-being this semester. During mid-term season, school can feel quite stressful, but knowing that the



next day was going to be spent connecting with nature in the solace of the orchard helped lower stress and get him through the week.

Once harvested, the apples are distributed through a variety of on- and off-campus channels. These include being sold fresh, donated to local organizations, used by Durham College's culinary programs, Bistro '67, and the Barrett Centre's value-added processing initiatives. This season a portion of the harvest was freeze dried and rendered apple chips. Freeze dried produce is an excellent choice for high-nutrient, shelf-stable, delicious snacks that can be distributed on campus or shared with partner organizations to support local food security.

When preparing apple chips, Rochelle, another of our WIL students, starts the process by selecting apples that are uniform in size. After coring, she makes thin slices using a mandolin, sprinkles her signature spice blend on both sides, then carefully lays the apples out onto a freeze-dryer tray. "Working here gives me a hands-on experience, and I get to try new things that I wouldn't typically get to do in class, like work with freeze dryers. This job gives me autonomy and allows the opportunity to test out what will work. For example, I made the spice recipe for the apple chips myself! Working here and creating products has helped me to be more prepared for life after graduation, because the hands-on learning really brings together the different theories that we learn in class." Rochelle.



The apple harvest at Durham College is more than just a seasonal task, it is a vibrant part of our living labs, where students build confidence, creativity, resilience, and the technical skills needed for a successful career in the agri-food sector.

In addition to our apple orchard, Durham College hosts a wide variety of niche orchard trees and bushes. Some of these varieties include elderberry, seabuckthorn, hascap, raspberry and goji berry. By teaching students to grow these diverse crops, we not only support their learning outcomes but also help them identify niche markets and cultivation methods that benefit them after graduation.

Unlike our traditionally planted apple orchards, the berry crops are situated within the Whitby Campus food forest. A *food forest* is one of the original farming methods used by Indigenous Nations in North America and around the world. Food forests combine edible annual and perennial crops across multiple layers, including roots, ground covers, vines and climbers, low tree cover and high tree cover and are planted in a structure which mimics a forest's natural structure.

This year, from our food forest harvest, we created a freeze-dried powdered smoothie booster, including annual plants like kale and purslane, and perennial berries like elderberry, goji and sea buckthorn. Just like the process with the apple chips, our students are involved at every step of the process and have the opportunity to explore, innovate and experiment in a safe and supported environment.

DigThis!

A quarterly publication of Durham Integrated Growers

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