

# Dig This!

Spring 2026

**Spring is here: Fresh Finds, Local Farms  
& Our Featured Writer**



## Agri-Hero

### Forsythe Family

Forsythe Family Farms is our Spring 2026 Agri-Hero! The story begins over 50 years ago. Jim Forsythe first got his hands in the dirt helping in his family's backyard garden in Toronto. It didn't take long before eating what they grew wasn't enough. Soon Jim was out picking, loading up his wagon, and going door to door selling to neighbours. That's where it all started.

As a teenager, he worked as a farmhand on family farms around Markham and Stouffville, rising before dawn and hitchhiking from the city to make it in time for chores. Come summer, he stayed with the farm families, living and working alongside them and learning the trade the old-fashioned way.

After finishing agricultural college, Jim



felt the pull back to the land.

He leased a piece of ground and set out to build something of his own. In 1972, Forsythe Farms took root. Over the years, as is so common in southern Ontario, the city edged closer, with fields giving way to streets and houses creeping up to the fence lines. In 1987, it finally pushed him out. Around that same time, Jim met Leslie, and that's when Forsythe Family Farms truly began.

The next farm was at the northern edge of Unionville, along Kennedy Road just north of Major Mackenzie. There, the business grew into a place where families could come out, breathe in the fresh air, and enjoy the simple goodness of farm life: good food, open space, and time together.

In 2013, development once again caught up with the Forsythes, and their lease came to an end. The pull of the land never left them, and this time, at

last, Jim and Leslie were able to buy a farm of their own in Greenbank, just east of Uxbridge at 1025 Cragg Rd, L9P 1R3.

The amazing thing about the farm (more than how it came to be) is the depth of experiences available, from pick-your-own strawberries, peas, beans, tomatoes, pumpkins, and flowers, to wagon rides, nature walks, playgrounds, corn and cedar mazes, and even bunny cuddles. Forsythe Family Farms also has beehives, turkeys, chickens, pies, preserves, and more.

For more information, email [forsythefamilyfarms@gmail.com](mailto:forsythefamilyfarms@gmail.com), call (905) 887-1087, or visit <https://forsythefamilyfarms.com/>. The farm is open Victoria Day to Christmas Eve, with registration open for Farm Tours (including school visits) and their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Farmers' markets start early May — we can't wait!

## Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be Thursday, March 26, 2026 at Hebron Christian Reformed Church, located at 4240 Anderson St., Whitby, beginning at 7 p.m. Come early to connect with fellow community gardeners, as well as our keynote speaker, Jessica Foote from Lunar Rhythms and DIG board members.

There will be light refreshments, a seed swap, and a door prize.

If you have not yet purchased or renewed your DIG membership, please do so in support of our vision, mission, and objectives, including the You Grow Durham



Photos from 2025 AGM

Fund (YGDF), where 25% of your membership dues go to helping fund new garden projects. Members also receive access to a password

protected section on our website which includes the feature film, "The Need to Grow", as well as 15 video classes, and so much more! Please visit <https://www.durhamdigs.ca/membership/>



Join us to hear our keynote speaker, Jessica Foote from Lunar Rhythms

## Save the Dates



♦ July 18th, 2026

Annual Garden Project Poker Run Tour

♦ November 2026

Garden Leadership Support Event

## Garden Tips

### Pest Spotlight:

#### Rabbits

This season's pest spotlight is on **eastern cottontail rabbits**, cute,



but definitely destructive in your garden. Most people know a rabbit when they see one, spotting them when they are most active, at dawn and dusk (called crepuscular versus nocturnal or diurnal). Rabbits camouflage well, and, to avoid predators, will bolt quickly in a zigzag pattern when threatened. Unlike some other rabbit species, cottontails do not burrow much, instead using shallow depressions in the ground or mounded piles of brush.

As winter settles in, rabbits take advantage of the stillness in the environment, and help themselves to bark, twigs, and buds, especially as the layer of snow piles up in the orchard. During particularly nasty winters, when the grass is covered in thick layers of snow, rabbits show their destructive nature to anyone who knows what to look for. If you have young apple trees, and failed to protect the trunk, rabbits will chew the bark, oftentimes to a fatal degree for the tree.

The list of a rabbit's preferred winter/early spring diet is extensive, so if you have any of the following trees, shrubs, and perennials in your garden, beware, as rabbits chew bark all the way around a trunk, causing girdling.

**Apple & crabapple (one of their favourite meals)**

**Maple (young saplings)**

**Birch**

**Willow (very attractive due to its soft bark)**

**Sumac**

**Dogwood**

**Rose**

**Burning bush**

**Serviceberry**

**Hydrangea**



(Image from blog.davey.com)

The most reliable rabbit prevention techniques combine exclusion (fencing/guards on tree trunks) with habitat management (i.e. removing brush piles), especially before winter when rabbits turn to woody plants.

A permaculture technique involves focusing on design before any plantings even occur. Place vulnerable plants closer to the house

or high-traffic structures like sheds in a community garden. Using less palatable species such as ninebark (available at onplants.ca) close to susceptible (and tasty) plants, and hawthorn around fencing to create a sharp barrier could reduce pest pressure. Most importantly of all is protecting your new plantings (they are most at risk) which will greatly reduce rabbit damage.



(Image from growingfruit.org)

These design and prevention tips are useful if you are just starting a community or backyard garden, or making an extension/upgrade to an existing project.

See "Nature's fingerprints" article from Winter 2026 to learn more about rabbit tracks in the snow. Stay tuned for our next edition, "Pest Spotlight: Managing Eastern Cottontail Rabbits in Spring and Summer (Part 2)" for more information. Do you have any tips on repelling pests?

Email [info@durhamdigs.ca](mailto:info@durhamdigs.ca) to share!

### The bold little bird of spring - Killdeer

Small, vocal, aggressively named, please welcome **Killdeer** back to Durham Region!



These migratory birds are harbingers of spring, arriving as soon as the ground softens—even while winter still lingers. This year, as temperatures swing back and forth, Killdeer wait out cold, blustery days, determined to be present for the first fresh mouthfuls of soil-dwelling invertebrates.

Unlike robins, who shelter in dense forests on bitter days, Killdeer don't hide—they shift to patches of open, thawed ground, like sunny south-

facing slopes, proving just how tough and adaptable they are.

But what a strange name! Like many birds, Killdeer are named for their call—a sharp, ringing "kill-dee!" They are medium-sized shorebirds with long legs, large dark eyes, and two bold black bands across the chest—their signature feature.

Often upright, they dash, stop, and peck as they forage, spooking easily.

If your garden, yard, or neighbourhood has bare soil, gravel, or open space—especially near parks, fields, or Lake Ontario shoreline flats—you've likely seen them.



Community gardens are ideal nesting spots this time of year. Killdeer often nest between rows, on paths, or even in active plots before planting begins. Be careful—these ground nests are well camouflaged and easy to step on.

Why care about Killdeer? They're part of nature's pest control, feeding

on beetles, grasshoppers, and caterpillars. They also signal a healthy ecosystem, and their probing helps lightly aerate soil.

A biodiverse environment is a happy one—so let's welcome back these zippy, plucky birds to Durham Region!

## I Fell in Love With Tomatoes at an Early Age

### Marek Warunkiewicz

I fell in love with tomatoes at an early age. I was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1954, into an extended family that lived in three different cities. My mother's family was from Czstochowa, a city in the southern part of Poland. Close by was a tiny (and I do mean tiny) village called Gidle where lived a woman who became one of my favourite relatives, my grandmother's youngest sister, Helena.

She was an unusual sort, the village doctor/herbalist, beekeeper, small farmer, keeper and lover of animals. I spent many idyllic summer days with her and her daughter, Małgosia. In summer, everything was seasonal and fresh, carrots, potatoes, berries, salads, radishes and of course, tomatoes. Małgosia and I would be in the garden, picking them off the vines and relishing every juicy bite. Love at first bite.

When we finally ended up in Canada in 1963, a good tomato was a rare treasure. It was the early 60s and mass production was the word of the day. But in the summer, outside of the Island of Montreal, were large communities of small farmers. When we lived at our cottage in a town called Rawdon, just a few minutes' walk away, was a farmers' stand and voila, flavour!

Moving to Toronto in the late 70s, I again experienced a dearth of good tomatoes. Eventually, I married. Bought a house with a nice garden in back, and while we were at a garden centre buying flowers, I came across tomato seeds being sold. The addiction started with eight plants and a rabbit hole of learning I gladly dropped into.

I now have over 400 varieties of tomato seeds, grow 60–70 plants for my family and friends, and start an average of 500 plants for local community gardens that grow for

local food banks as donations. My secondary interest is the pepper family. From sweet to super-hot, I grow and love them.

When asked to pen an article for the DIG Newsletter, after a few ideas were tossed around, the decision was made for me to introduce my favourites, ones I grow year after year. The other thing about me that you need to know is that I love stories, stories that often become myth. Oh, and sharing, I love sharing the things I am passionate about and hearing other people's stories, both of their life adventures and their own passions. Forgot to mention: my other, some would say dominant, passion is food and cooking it.

What makes these nineteen tomatoes my perennial favourites? Every one is full-flavoured, beautiful to look at, and reliably rewarding to grow. But they're also, each in their own way, a story. Some carry the names of the families who loved and saved them across generations. Some crossed oceans and survived wars. Some were bred by dreamers with no formal training who changed the course of tomato history. That's the magic of the heirloom community, we share, we help each other, and we eat extraordinarily well.

All tomatoes share the same scientific name, *Solanum lycopersicum*, but each variety has their own name and, often, their own story. In alphabetical order, off we go on our journey through my tomatolandia.

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### Nineteen tomatoes, nineteen stories, and a lifetime's worth of reasons to get your hands in the soil.

#### Green Zebra - Marek's Favourite

*Sprouting:* 5–8 days | *Maturity:* ~75 days

Green Zebra produces small to medium fruits with distinctive bright

green stripes over a chartreuse base, stunning in the garden and on the plate.



A plate of these, sliced, drizzled in a rich extra virgin olive oil (may I recommend MORESH EVOO, available at Longo's), some lemon juice or aged balsamic, and maybe some thin slices of a very sweet onion, served with a fresh, crusty baguette – OH MY! I swoon! This is the tomato I would choose if I could only grow one, but I can't only grow ONE.

#### The History:

Unlike many heirlooms, Green Zebra was intentionally bred by American tomato breeder Tom Wagner in the early 1980s. Wagner's work helped popularize green-when-ripe tomatoes and proved that new varieties could carry all the character and personality of the oldest heirlooms. A true original.

#### Ananas Noir

*Sprouting:* 6–10 days | *Maturity:* ~80–85 days

Large, marbled fruits streaked with green, red, and gold, with a rich, complex flavour and a hint of smokiness. A true showstopper in the garden and on the plate.

> *Read more in the full feature*

#### Alice's Dream

*Sprouting:* 5–8 days | *Maturity:* ~70–75 days

Golden-yellow fruits with deep indigo shoulders and beautifully balanced flavour — as striking to look at as they are to eat.

> *Read more in the full feature*

Full Feature at <https://www.durhamdigs.ca/blog/>

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Marek is also in the process of launching his own website tomatolandia, and we're excited to be partnering and sharing more together — stay tuned!

## Garden Tip

### Patience pays in spears

What takes three years of patience and rewards you for more than two decades?

**Asparagus.** Grown for its exquisite fresh taste, asparagus is also a nutritional superstar, rich in folate (vitamin B9) for cell growth, inulin—a prebiotic fiber that feeds beneficial gut bacteria—and the antioxidant glutathione, which helps defend cells and support liver detox. A perfect spring tonic, asparagus helps wake the body after a long, dreary winter.



There are two main approaches to growing your own asparagus: purchase crowns, or start seeds for a cheaper—but slower and more fragile—route.

But what are crowns? They are the plant's underground base, including roots, a short central stem, and multiple buds (these become next year's spears). With crowns, you're buying a head start, shaving off a year since they are already 1–2 years old.

According to Vandermeer Nursery, leave crowns untouched in year one. In year two, harvest sparingly for 2–3 weeks (or not at all). By year three, your asparagus is ready for a full harvest of 6–8 weeks (until June), then allow it to rest and

rebuild energy for the next season.

The seed approach: in our area, start seeds indoors about eight weeks before the last frost—around mid-March. Soaking seeds for 12–24 hours and using a warming mat (24–27°C soil) helps germination. Expect seedlings in about two weeks.

Once the risk of hard frost has passed and soil conditions improve, harden off seedlings over 7 days by gradually increasing outdoor exposure. Space plants 30–45 cm (12–18") apart in rows 90–120 cm (3–4 ft) apart—no thinning required.



Having grown asparagus both ways, I recommend crowns. Seedlings are weak and easily overtaken by weeds, while crowns compete much better.

Like any long-lived crop, asparagus attracts a few freeloaders. Rabbits and deer may nibble tender growth, but the main pests are common and spotted asparagus beetles. See the blog post "Got beetles" for control tips.

All in all, few crops ask for three years up front—but the payoff is well worth it. Plant it well, and future generations will thank you each spring.

Get seeds or crowns at Vesey's: <https://www.veseys.com/ca/guelphmilleniumasparagus.html>

## Recipe

### Lemony Fettuccine Alfredo with Asparagus



A fresh, creamy spring pasta with bright lemon and tender asparagus

Makes 4 servings

#### Ingredients:

- ½ cup half-and-half, light cream or whipping cream
- 1 tablespoon butter or margarine
- 1 teaspoon finely shredded lemon peel
- 6 ounces of dried fettuccine or spinach fettuccine
- 1 cup fresh or frozen asparagus cut into 1 inch pieces
- ¾ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Cracked black pepper

#### Instructions:

1. Allow half-and-half and butter to stand at room temperature for 30 minutes
2. Cook fettuccine according to directions.
3. Add asparagus to the fettuccine in the last 5 minutes of cooking time
4. Drain. Return fettuccine and asparagus to saucepan
5. Gently stir in half-and-half, butter, lemon, and parmesan cheese
6. To serve, sprinkle with pepper and if desired ¼ cup broken walnuts or pecans

### Spring starts at the market

Get ready for local food as markets are set to open soon across Durham Region!

**Willow Tree, Pingle's, Geissberger, Watson** (Apr), **Kent** (early May), **Forsythe** (mid-May)

Weekly Markets (May–June):

**Tue:** Pickering (June–Oct)

**Wed:** Whitby (mid-May)

**Thu:** Whitby/DC (late May–June)

**Fri:** Bowmanville (mid-May), Oshawa Centre (June)

**Sat:** Port Perry (Victoria Day), North Oshawa (mid-May), Brooklin (June), Oshawa pop-ups

**Sun:** Uxbridge (early May), Clarington/Newcastle (mid-May)

*Check markets for exact dates.*



## Dig This!

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