

# Dig This!

Spring 2024

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**Significant achievements to celebrate ~ see page 2.**

**Hello springtime! You're early!**

## Agri-Hero

### Nutcracker Ridge Farm

It is nestled just outside of Uxbridge on 100 acres. Owners Earl Hughson and Roselyn Meissner use 12 of those acres for 2,600 hazelnut trees. The first ones were planted in 2015 on rich pastureland, with a high water table, adjacent to a spring-fed pond. They grew at twice the rate of recent plantings. Paradoxically, the farm has a large hill with thin, gravelly leached sand and stoney soil at the top; the hazelnuts grow best there, as opposed to the base where the soil tends to be richer and moist.

February's mild weather made it possible to begin pruning. Low branches were removed to facilitate mowing; crooked branches and high branches were removed to allow sunlight into the centre of the tree, thereby increasing nut production. Young trees were not pruned. The older trees were getting quite tall, and since Nutcracker Ridge will eventually be a pick-your-own (rather than a commercial grower), they were pruned to ensure future customers will be able to easily reach the nuts.

Earl and Roselyn select cold-climate cultivars, of which they have 16 different types growing. The trees have been bred for yield and disease resistance. They are clones, take 2-3 years to be ready for planting, and take 5-7 years to produce a significant number of nuts. Talk about long-term thinking!

Roselyn has spent some of her winter experimenting with hazelnut recipes including roasted hazelnuts, Valentine's Day truffles, hazelnut infused coffee and a spiced hazelnut hummus. (See our adapted recipe on page 4 ~ Squash and hazelnut hummus.)

And now for some interesting facts! Turkey is the world's largest supplier of hazelnuts (70%), followed by Italy, Azerbaijan, and the U.S. (all in just one valley in Oregon). Almost one



million tons of hazelnut kernels are harvested annually, making hazelnuts the world's fifth-largest tree nut crop. Ferrero buys around 55% of the global supply. One of their largest plants in Brantford must import thousands of tons of hazelnuts to keep up with demand for Nutella and Rocher chocolates.

Hazelnut trees are carbon sinks, as they capture more carbon than they release. They are drought tolerant, bloom during winter, are wind-pollinated, and are long-lived, sometimes producing nuts for up to a hundred years (typically 20-50 years)! They are the highest nut in folate and proanthocyanidin (a polyphenol that has anti-inflammatory properties and may help prevent cancer).

Yes, hazelnut and philbert are the same thing.

For more information, visit The Ontario Hazelnut Association's webpage, [ontariohazelnuts.com](http://ontariohazelnuts.com) or <https://tinyurl.com/yck6mwhx>

Nutcracker Ridge Farms: [nutcrackerridge@gmail.com](mailto:nutcrackerridge@gmail.com), 10079 Durham Regional Road 1, Uxbridge ON L9P 1R2.

## Good things are coming your way!

**Thursday, March 28, 2024, 7pm**

### DIG's annual general meeting (AGM)

A new location this year – Hebron Christian Reformed Church, 4240 Anderson St., Whitby.

Our keynote is Sayeh Beheshti speaking about nurturing biodiversity through native plants. For a sneak peak at one of Sayeh's projects visit [www.torontowildlifecentre.com/pollinator-gardening/](http://www.torontowildlifecentre.com/pollinator-gardening/)

A seed swap too! Bring your favourite, or something you have in excess, and make sure the seeds are labelled.

By now, our membership should have received email with details and board reports.



**Weekends of March 23-24 and April 6-7**

### Purple Woods Maple Syrup Festival

Sap collected from PW maple trees is boiled into delicious syrup! Visit the sugar shack housing the evaporator equipment to see how it is made. Plus enjoy games, activities, horse-drawn wagon rides, pancakes with syrup and the on-site store for take-home goodies.



**Saturday, July 22**

### DIG's Annual Garden Tour & Poker Run

This year's route heads to the south of Durham Region. As we plan destinations, please advise if you would like your garden project included. ~ [info@durhamdigs.ca](mailto:info@durhamdigs.ca)

**More events ~** See the King Street Cooperative Community Garden article on page 3.

## Exciting new Agri-Training

**Four Farms Market Garden Training** is a new agricultural initiative launching this spring in Durham Region and Northumberland County.

Training takes participants through a season on four diversified organic farms in just six weekend-long classes. Students gain hands-on experience, expert guidance, and access to a supportive farm network. The program caters to aspiring regenerative farmers and advancing home gardeners, providing them with the

knowledge and skills to become stewards of the land.

Instructing farms are:

Acre Farm  
City of Greens  
Foragers Farm  
Second Season Farm

<https://horticulturefoodandfarminginstitute.thinkific.com/courses/fourfarms>



City of Greens was our Summer 2018 Agri-Hero. Co-owner Ryan Cullen along with Tyler & Erin from Foragers Farm, were panelists at DIG's Urban Agriculture Symposium 2019.

Second Season Farm was our Spring 2022 Agri-Hero. Later that year, Michael Longarini led us on a tour of his farm, as part of our annual Garden Tour/Poker Run.

To read more, visit our website, and peruse past newsletters here ~ [www.durhamdigs.ca/resources](http://www.durhamdigs.ca/resources)

## Durham Food Policy Council releases Durham's first ever food system report card

News release March 11, 2024.

Coinciding with National Nutrition Month, today the Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC) is launching Durham's first ever food system report card. It provides a one-stop overview of the local food system's assets and issues across many dimensions of the food system. These include local food access, food production, farmland protection, food waste, food education and literacy, Indigenous food sovereignty, cultural connections to food, and the welfare of farmers and food system workers.

The Report Card builds on more than 20 years of work by many people across Durham toward robust food system planning.

It draws specifically on more than two years of research and engagement, pulling together information from: health and social service organizations; food growers, processors, and distributors; urban agriculture initiatives; environmental organizations; Indigenous leadership and organizations; municipal staff; post-secondary institutions; faith communities; and the general public.

The Report Card applies a food sovereignty framework to pull together key metrics for success across all sectors of Durham's local food system. A few highlights include:

- 15.5% of Durham households were food insecure from 2018 to 2020. Food and housing costs alone were \$509 higher than the income of a single person receiving Ontario Works (OW) and \$322 higher than the income of a single person receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). (Durham Region Health Department, 2022).
- The number of farms in Durham has declined 17.5% since 2011, with smaller decreases among larger farms. The average size of farms overall has risen (Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture, 2022).
- 65% of farms report having no succession plan (Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture, 2022).
- The three-month demand for certain kinds of produce can be met by Durham's current acreage for apples, wheat, sweet corn, green peas, pumpkins, cauliflower, and oats (OMAFRA, 2022).

The Report Card supports the advancement of the Durham Region Food Charter, a citizen-defined and regionally-endorsed vision for a just and sustainable local food system founded on strong policy, local agriculture, community partnership, and health foundations. The Durham Food Policy Council is a citizen-based collaborative committee established to enact the principles of the Durham Region Food Charter. Longtime chairperson of DFPC states,

*"We all play a role in this food system. The report card helps us all see this. It shows where the food system is now and can help us determine where we want to go. But only together can we create a food system that benefits everyone. What will you do with the Durham Food System Report Card? The next steps are ours, together. Are you in?"*

DFPC sees this first Report Card as reflecting priority action areas. It envisions subsequent versions in future years as tracking progress related to food justice and sustainability in the region. The overall goal is working together for community food security and a sustainable, resilient local food system in Durham.

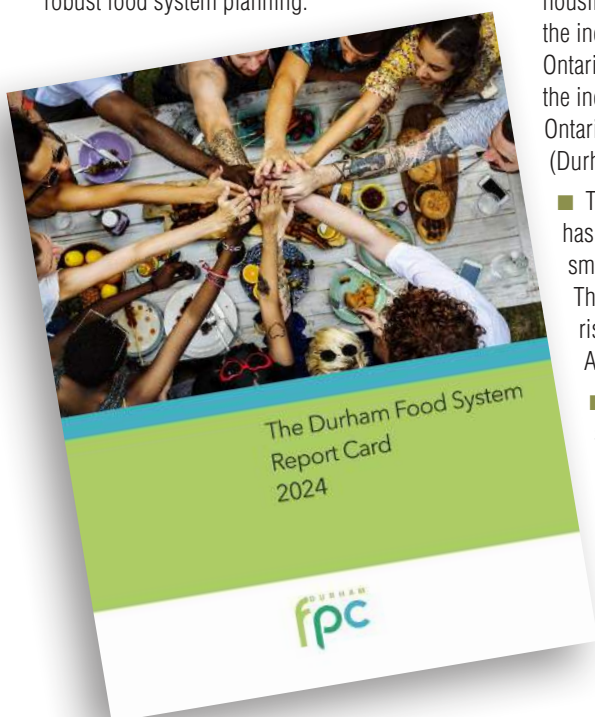
The Report Card is available in two versions: a full version including greater detail and sources and a condensed version containing the most essential information. Both versions and more information are available at <https://www.durhamfoodpolicycouncil.com/>

For more information, please contact:

Mary Drummond, [info@durhamfoodpolicycouncil.com](mailto:info@durhamfoodpolicycouncil.com)

Francesca Hannan, [hannanfrancesca@gmail.com](mailto:hannanfrancesca@gmail.com)

or Mary Anne Martin, [marymartin2@trentu.ca](mailto:marymartin2@trentu.ca)



## Look up, around, and listen! Do you hear it? Birdsong has returned to the Great White North.

As of writing (February 28), red-winged blackbirds have migrated back to Durham Region, after what feels like a short time south. Like many migratory birds, the distances they cover is astounding; red-winged blackbirds fly to southern parts of the United States, Mexico, and Central America for winter months. Some go as far as northern parts of South America, forming dense flocks in the thousands.

While many birders consider red-breasted robins as the harbingers of spring, it may be more accurate to consider red-winged blackbirds for that role. Robins do in fact migrate south; yet many head to warmer regions within Canada if suitable food and shelter are available, often just heading into dense forests to wait out the cold and darkness.

Robins mostly feed on fruits, and berries, such as holly, juniper, and dogwood berries,

as well as fruits like crabapples, wild apples, buckthorn and prickly ash berries. Red-winged blackbirds, if desperate, may consume buckthorn and prickly ash berries too, but generally stick to grains and seeds in marshes, fields and wetlands.

Male blackbirds return before females, and aggressively claim nesting territories. Dive-bombing of other birds, predators and even humans, is common during the spring breeding season. Males will utter many different vocalizations (birdsong) including the common “conk-la-ree”, in an effort to attract not one but several mates. This bird species is polygynous, where a single male mates with many females.

Seeing red-winged blackbirds around should be a cause for celebration, since they are voracious eaters of “pest” insects. They contribute to the health and diversity of their



habitats by acting as native seed dispersers, and help support populations of cattails, bulrushes, sedges, switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), sunflowers, goldenrods, milkweeds, dogwoods, sumacs, and elderberries.

## Being an advocate for land preservation

The deforestation and fragmentation of habitats running rampant in our culture has triggered a drastic decline of many songbird species.

*Individual* people may not be able to reforest our community so that wood thrushes, red-eyed vireos, ovenbirds, and scarlet tanagers return to Durham Region in full force. *Collectively* however, we can move government to restrain development, rather than continue with current sprawl.

DIG has showcased several community voices about the issue of Bill 23 and about protecting The Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve – DRAP. (See previous issues of DigThis.)

There was a year of intense pressure from many advocate groups, and from Ontario’s Auditor General, whose scathing report found that “certain developers received preferential treatment and had direct influence over the government’s decision to extract lands from the Greenbelt”. The report also found that there was already enough land available to build

housing and that there was no need to remove lands from the Greenbelt to meet housing targets.

September brought good news when the Ontario government “promised” to return all lands to the Greenbelt. On October 16, the Greenbelt Statute Law Amendment Act, 2023 was introduced which will restore 7,400 acres of farmland and natural areas back into the Greenbelt.

The fight to protect our natural heritage in Ontario (and the world) is not over! The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks has proposed changes to “streamline” regulations under the Endangered Species Act, 2007, in effect creating loopholes for developers to ignore safeguards for protecting species at risk.

It’s easy to overlook the value of what we take for granted today until we realize how much we will rely on it tomorrow. Stay alert. This is our home.

## King Street Cooperative Community Garden

We at KSCCG (390 King St. Whitby) are very excited to be starting our second growing season. We have already planted spring veggies like lettuce, radishes and spinach.

This year, we are planning two events for Earth Day weekend in April. Come join us:

### **Saturday, April 20th, 1-3 pm**

Whitby Public Library

See the inspirational, award-winning documentary film on sustainable urban agriculture – *Need to Grow*. Admission is free. Door prizes to be awarded.

### **Sunday April 21, 10 am -12 pm**

At our garden site

Annual park clean-up.

To sign up for either event, please email – [ksccg.board@gmail.com](mailto:ksccg.board@gmail.com).

## Unique volunteer opportunity

Wanted ~ a document designer and writer to work on DigThis newsletter, taking each issue to polished PDF publishing state. Our current person is retiring. If you have graphic design skills, and appropriate software, can word-smith, and don’t mind working for well, free, please contact DIG.



## GardenTip

### A few plants to consider in your garden plan

**English Lavender**, a hardy perennial, makes an excellent repellent against onion maggots, and if planted around fruit trees, will deter codling moth! It requires lots of sun and good drainage.

**Rosemary**, although a semi-hardy perennial, is good at repelling carrot fly and bean beetle. To propagate, take late summer cuttings to sprout inside, for planting next spring. A few extra sprigs tossed into the clothes cupboard will keep away moths and silverfish!

**Fennel**, high in minerals vital to bone health, is a vegetable that is so versatile you can eat all of its parts, including bulb, stalks, leaves, flowers, seeds, raw or cooked. It can be planted near house entrance ways – windows and doors – to ward off flies and mosquitoes. Fresh fennel leaves rubbed through your dog's coat, and placed in bedding will reduce the incidence of fleas.

**Cucumber** and **sunflowers** make lovely companions! Cucumbers use the thick stalk of the sunflower as a trellis, and it is said that cucumbers sweeten when nearby.

## GardenTip

### DIY seed tape

Seed tape is long strips of biodegradable paper embedded with seeds spaced at the correct interval for them to grow. You can buy seed tape, but it can be expensive. It's easy to make your own.

Check out this easy-to-follow guide from the University of Saskatchewan –

<https://gardening.usask.ca/articles-and-lists/articles-how-to/make-your-own-seed-tape.php>



## GardenTip

### Saving seeds?

Many vegetables are 'open-pollinated'. This means that the flowers (which then bear fruit) are pollinated by wind, insects, birds, or other animals, and their seeds will usually produce offspring similar to the parent plant.

**Save** seeds from these veggies as they will generally breed true:

- tomatoes (except for some hybrid varieties)
- peppers (bell peppers, chili peppers)
- beans (pole beans, bush beans, snap beans)
- peas (shelling and snow peas)
- lettuce
- spinach
- swiss chard
- radish.

For some veggies, open-pollination is **risky** because of hybridization or cross-pollination. Seeds will not produce true to the parent plant. This can be prevented by giving lots of space between different varieties of the same species; often difficult in small gardens or urban environments. These veggies include:

- cucumbers
- melons
- squashes

Some types are more likely to cross-pollinate than others, which adds a further layer of complication. For example, different varieties of cucumbers may cross-pollinate more readily than varieties of squash.

Planning your garden now is key! A distance of 100 feet (30 meters) between different varieties of the same species is recommended to minimize cross-pollination. This distance can vary depending on factors such as insect pollinators (bees travel far and wide, whereas flies and beetles stick close to home) and wind. Wild relatives or other varieties of the same species growing nearby may still cross-pollinate.

Despite the challenges, saving seed from open-pollinated vegetables can preserve genetic diversity within their crops.

Note that some seeds from biennial vegetables are **impractical** to save. In the first year, they grow vegetatively (foliage, roots), and in the second year, they produce flowers and seeds before completing their life cycle. The most common of these are: carrots, beets, onions, and some varieties of cabbage and kale.

## Recipe

### Squash hazelnut hummus

Adapted from <https://spicetrekkers.com/recipes/squash-and-hazelnut-hummus>



#### Ingredients

- 1 cup roasted squash (any winter squash, including pumpkin)
- ¼ cup hazelnuts
- 2 Tbsp tahini
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp toasted sesame seeds
- 1 tsp sea salt
- ½ tsp black pepper

A drizzle of extra virgin olive oil as a garnish

#### Steps

- 1 Cut up squash and oven roast at 350° for 30 minutes (or until tender).  
In a separate dish, roast hazelnuts for 5 minutes.
- 2 Pulse the hazelnuts into a coarse or fine powder, depending on your preferred texture.
- 3 In a large bowl, mash the squash until it is a paste.
- 4 Add all other ingredients, and stir until combined.
- 5 Garnish with hazelnuts and oil.

## DigThis!

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Editor Mary Drummond

Contributors Adrian Hogendoorn  
Ruth Latimer

Layout Latimer Graphics

WEBSITE [www.durhamdigs.ca](http://www.durhamdigs.ca)

EMAIL [info@durhamdigs.ca](mailto:info@durhamdigs.ca)

FACEBOOK [www.facebook.com/DurhamDIGs](https://www.facebook.com/DurhamDIGs)

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