

Dig This!

Fall 2024

So long busy Summer. Hello bountiful Fall.



Annual garden tour

On July 20, 2024, DIG, along with guests from inside and outside Durham, participated in an exciting tour of horticultural treasures tucked away in urban and rural spaces throughout the Region. We enjoyed a day of exploration, shopping, camaraderie, education, fresh air and exercise.

Our tours are the perfect way to network with like-minded individuals, and to take inspiration from hard working gardeners growing nutritious local food and herbs.

The itinerary:

- 1 Harmony Community Garden, Oshawa
- 2 Mary Street Community Garden, Oshawa
- 3 Hebron Community Garden, Whitby
- 4 Hy Hope Farm (this issue's Agri-Hero), Ashburn
- 5 Whitby Ajax Garden Project, where we ate lunch.
- 6 Greenwood Botanicals
- 7 St. Andrew's Community Garden, Ajax

A highlight for many was Greenwood Botanicals: the enchanting domain of Certified Herbalist Diane Tait. We strolled through this biodiverse garden, gleaning knowledge from Diane, and even met some endangered plant species such as Black Cohosh and Goldenseal.

Each spring, Diane teaches a beginner course in herbal remedies at her home and garden. In this course there are seven one-day classes where participants learn to identify, harvest and process medicinal herbs; and learn how to make salves, herbal extracts and tea blends.

For more information, visit www.greenwoodbotanicals.ca

Diane can be reached at 905-428-7969 or dianeseuf@rogers.com.



Agri-Hero

Hy Hope Farm

As a favourite country destination in North Durham Region, people have been enjoying the Hy Hope experience for over 40 years!

During a stop on our DIG Annual Garden Tour & Poker Run, we had the pleasure of shopping for delicious locally produced foods such as plums, sweet cherries, red and black currants, gooseberries, rhubarb and blueberries. As a trial this year, raspberries are now grown on-site hydroponically. That is, cultivated in coconut coir with liquid nutrient piped into this growing medium. This method enables Hy Hope Farm to manage pests and diseases more efficiently, and to increase yields significantly! Because of their success this year, the plan is to gradually move away from field-grown berries and into a covered system of production.



Hy Hope makes many of their products from scratch using their very own fruit for pies and preserves such as jams, jellies, pickles, and more. In late summer, they have 15 types of apples growing on 18 acres of orchards. They also offer pumpkins, squash, cabbage, cauliflower and root vegetables. Although some produce is not grown on-site, the Farm is committed to selling veggies as locally and as fresh as possible.

If fruits and vegetables weren't enough, Hy Hope has their own flock of chickens. Fresh eggs are for sale daily. As well, their freezers are stocked with naturally raised beef, pork and chicken, all free from growth hormones, pasture-fed, and free-range.

Yet more! Hy Hope Farm bakes bread daily, using stone ground flour from locally grown spring red wheat and rye, which is milled using traditional methods. And who could forget their famous butter tarts, made using "Nan's secret butter tart recipe [with] REAL BUTTER".

Located at 5450 Lake Ridge Rd, Ashburn, Hy Hope Farm is open daily, even in winter. To be sure, it is best to contact them for their hours of operation at info@hyhopefarm.ca. Their Facebook page and website have information as well:

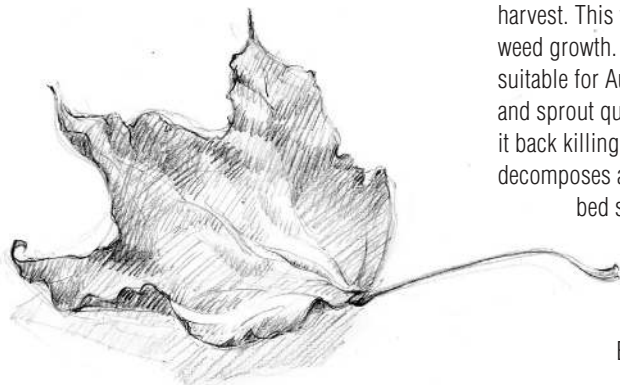
hyhopefarm.ca

www.facebook.com/hyhopefarmgolf

Recharging the soil in raised beds

Does your raised garden bed soil look and feel dry and lightweight, almost like all of it has vanished into thin air? Are decomposing insects nonexistent? Is the soil more like dirt - dead, lifeless, spent? Then it might be time to consider a recharge! Unlike a traditional garden bed, where roots can wander without constraints, raised beds (and other containers for that matter) need a little more TLC at the end of the growing season.

Imagine for a moment the vast quantity of energy a growing plant uses, both from sunlight and its growing medium. Plants must develop strong roots, stems, foliage, blooms, flowers, and finally the precious fruit. These little miracle workers extract nutrients and form symbiotic relationships with organisms living in and around their roots. Yet, nothing lasts forever.



Add as much compost as you can because that stuff really is the cure for what ails your soil. Compost is loosely arranged, full of nutrients, microbes and moisture. It's absorbent too!

A few other cheap and easy ways to help your beds include adding chopped up leaves, grass clippings and aged manure. This should be done in late fall and mixed in well.

If you want to get fancy, go for perlite. This volcanic rock expands when it gets warm, and in the process, creates air channels for water and nutrients to find their way to plant roots. Use perlite if your beds seem compacted. It breaks down very slowly, so the up front investment pays for itself!

Finally, a concept popular in permaculture/regenerative agriculture, is green manuring. This means the planting of cover crops after harvest. This will deter erosion and suppress weed growth. Fall oats and annual rye are suitable for Autumn seeding in raised beds, and sprout quickly. In the spring, simply cut it back killing the plants. The dead vegetation decomposes and adds nutrients to the raised bed soil. It's a win-win!

For more information on green manuring, check out the book *The New Organic Grower* by Eliot Coleman.

Speaking of raised beds...

Our community gardens are creative. ~

Whitby Ajax Garden Project uses sturdy, traditional **wooden** beds which are lined to prevent wood deterioration.



Harmony CG constructed beds using **Hemlock**. Although more expensive than regular wood, Hemlock is prized for its

stability and water resistance. A liner, although recommended, is optional as the wood will last several years without one.

St. Andrews CG uses modern **galvanized steel** beds.

These are easier to assemble than wood beds and are long-lasting.



Harvesting and storing your garden vegetables

By Jackie Bantle, a horticulturist living in Saskatoon.

This article is provided courtesy of the Saskatchewan Perennial Society (SPS; saskperennial@hotmail.com).

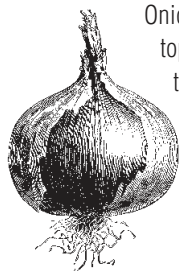
Check their website (www.saskperennial.ca) or Facebook page (www.facebook.com/saskperennial).

The days are getting shorter and some of the nights are cooler. Fall is a bittersweet time for vegetable gardeners: all the hard work of the growing season is finally paying off with a delicious and varied harvest. However, we know that the supply of fresh, home grown vegetables is coming to a close.

Not all plants respond equally to frost. Some vegetables improve after a slight frost while others are destroyed by temperatures that are just slightly above 0°C. Vegetables that must be harvested prior to a killing frost (0°C) include cucumbers, beans, eggplant, lettuce, watermelon, peas, peppers, zucchini, tomato, cantaloupe and corn. While the actual corncob may not freeze, once the plants are frozen the cobs should be harvested as soon as possible as toxic nitrates will build up in the cobs since the unfrozen roots continue to take up nitrogen from the soil.

Cantaloupe is usually harvested at "full slip", when the fruit easily detaches from the vine at the stem end. If frost is imminent and the fruit does not detach from the vine, harvest the fruit with approximately 1cm of vine attached and leave it at room temperature for 6-7 days. If the cantaloupe fruit has reached physiological maturity, it will continue to ripen after harvest. If it is not mature, the fruit will rot.

Mature green tomatoes and peppers will continue to ripen in storage. Mature green tomatoes are generally a slightly duller green with some hint of color change. Store green tomatoes at 15°C in a well-ventilated area. Green peppers are ready to harvest when their walls are firm to the touch. Store them at room temperature in a paper bag to ripen to red. Ethylene gas released by the peppers encourages the colour change. Add a banana to the bag for faster ripening. Red peppers should be stored in the fridge.

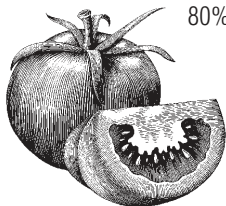


Onions are ready to harvest once their tops have fallen over. Stubborn onion tops can be "encouraged" to fall over by lightly stepping on them. Trim off the stems at the point at which they're broken. Harvest onions if frosts of -1°C or lower are predicted, allowing them to cure in a warm location (20°C) with good air movement for about one week. This can be done outdoors in the sun if weather conditions are favorable. After curing, the tops should be removed and the onions placed in cool storage (ideally 1-2°C with 70% relative humidity).



Leeks can withstand a few degrees of frost and have a slightly sweeter flavour if they are exposed to cooler temperatures. Unlike onions, they are not destined for long term storage. Trim off the loose leaves and store them in clear plastic bag with tiny holes for air exchange in the fridge.

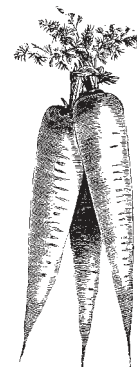
Cabbage can withstand up to 3 degrees of frost. Brussels sprouts benefit from several degrees of frost to encourage a sweet flavour and can withstand several hard frosts of -4 or -5°C as long as they thaw during the day. Ideal storage conditions for cabbage and Brussels sprouts are 1°C with 80% relative humidity.



Root and tuber crops such as beets, carrots, rutabagas and potatoes should be left in the ground for at least one killing frost to improve their sweetness. As long as night temperatures do not dip below -4°C and are above 8°C during the day, the soil provides enough insulation to prevent the roots and tubers from freezing. To encourage potato tuber skins to set, the tops should either be dead or physically removed for at least one week prior to harvest.



Remove the loose soil from roots and tubers prior to storage, but avoid washing them as excess moisture in any fresh wounds incurred during harvest may encourage root rot. Do not dry root or tuber vegetables in the sun as this only warms them up and compromises storage. Light encourages the production of glycoalkaloids in potatoes, giving them a bitter flavour, and are toxic at high levels.



Although winter squash and pumpkin vines freeze at 0°C, the mature fruit can survive -4°C. Once harvested, cure them indoors in a warm (20°C) dry location. Long term storage in a slightly cooler, dry basement is recommended for pumpkins and winter squash. Green pumpkins can be ripened to orange in a warm, sunny, dry location.

Finding ideal storage conditions for your garden produce can be a challenge. Most home refrigerators have limited space for the bulky harvest of cabbage, potatoes and other root crops. One storage solution is the use of covered (to increase humidity) wooden boxes in a garage where the temperature is kept just above 0°C through the winter. Root cellars also provide good winter storage areas for most root crops as long as temperatures are kept cool and the humidity can be kept slightly elevated.

After all the hard work put in during the growing season, it's a wonderful reward to be able to enjoy those home grown vegetables into the fall and winter months.

GardenTip

Pruning

It's my least favourite garden task! Likely due to ignorance and compassion for living plants, I have a hard time cutting back my garden's vegetation. Even though I know pruning promotes growth (seems counterintuitive!), and helps air circulate, I am still apprehensive to cut. If you are like me, read on to find out what needs pruning in the Autumn, and how to go about it!

I use one-hand pruning shears (or secateurs), but some jobs may require two-handed implements. Whatever the tool, it needs to be clean and sharp. Wipe the entire tool and blades with isopropyl alcohol and let dry. Cuts are made just above a growth node or bud. (See The Nourish & Develop Foundation (TNDF) and DIG's virtual Table Talk with Nature's Bounty's general manager for more information on technique: youtu.be/WoAlcHa0wdQ.)

Never prune when it's damp or wet outside, as this can spread disease.

First, the easy part –

What not to prune this time of year:

Leave summer-bearing raspberries and fruit trees alone, as well as any plant that exudes sap when cut. Azalea, viburnum, Loropetalum, and lilac should all be pruned in early spring, not now.

Rosemary plants, taken indoors for the winter should be cut back in the Spring a few weeks before returning outdoors.

What to prune now:

Currants and gooseberries: thin out to promote healthy growth and fruiting.

Autumn-fruiting raspberries: cut shoots that have fruited this year down to the ground. New canes will emerge in the Spring and bear fruit in the Fall.

Blackberries: after fruiting, prune canes that have just produced berries. They only produce fruit on canes that are two years old, and



after that will never produce berries on that cane again. Cutting these spent canes off will encourage the production of more first year canes.

Strawberries (June-bearing varieties): prune the foliage to a height of 1-2 inches above the crown. This promotes healthy growth.

Lavender: It may be pruned this time of year. For thorough advice on Lavender, check out: www.ontario.ca/page/growing-lavender-ontario-introduction-prospective-growers#section-6

Thyme: Trim the flower heads off, above the first set of healthy leaves.

Recipe

Pumpkin Squares



1 Package two-layer spice cake mix

½ Cup melted butter or margarine

3 Eggs

1 Cup canned pumpkin

½ Cup sugar

½ Teaspoon grated orange peel

½ Cup chopped pecans

Reserve 2/3 cup dry cake mix.

In a large bowl combine remaining cake mix, butter and 1 of the eggs. Mix well. Pat into a greased 13x9x2 inch baking pan. Bake at 350 for 15 minutes.

Combine rest of cake mix and pumpkin, sugar, 2 eggs, orange peel. And dash of salt. Beat at medium speed of electric mixer for 1-2 minutes. Pour over partially baked layer. Top with nuts. Bake at 350 until set – 15-20 minutes. Cool, then cut into bars. Refrigerate. Makes 32.

*Instructions for living a life.
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.*

Mary Oliver

DigThis!

A quarterly publication of Durham Integrated Growers

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