

Dig This!

Winter 2024



DIGging into winter and hoping for a great gardening year in 2024

Agri-Heros

BROOK'S FARMS

EST. 1987
PINGLE'S FARM MARKET

Both farms offer unique Christmas events to raise your holiday cheer and to get you through the dark time of the year.

At Pingle's, beginning weekends from December 2nd to the 17th, Santa Claus is coming to town! Come meet the big guy, get your photo taken, take part in storytime on a wagon ride, listen to live music and shows in the greenhouse, make a DIY Christmas Craft, get comfy and cozy by the bonfires, shop at the Mistletoe Market, pick up your fragrant Christmas Tree, and indulge in festive food! Breakfast poutine (yes please!) and other offerings such as hash browns and pancakes, with a gourmet twist! There are also soups and chilis, and tummy warming drinks to put some pep in your step. Check them out from 9 am to 4 pm (last entry at 2:30 pm).

If that event isn't enough, Pingle's is also hosting an Ugly Christmas Sweater Party Friday nights in December from 6 to 8 pm beginning on the 1st, and concluding on the 22nd. Tickets include admission to the greenhouse party, decked out from top to bottom in Christmas decor, "all you can eat" small plates from the Merry Menu, live Christmas music, Christmas themed drinks at an additional cost, cozy fire pits (first come first serve).

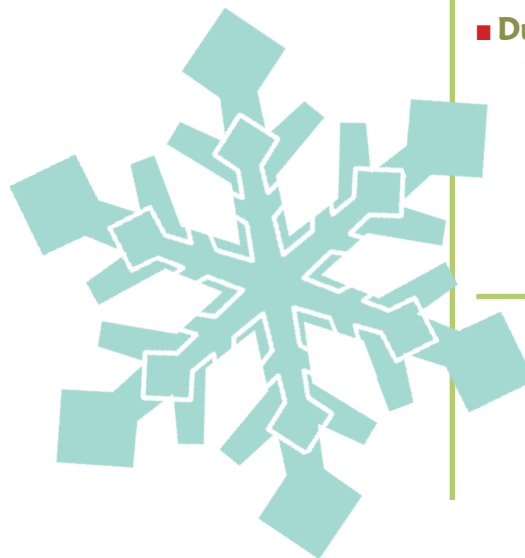
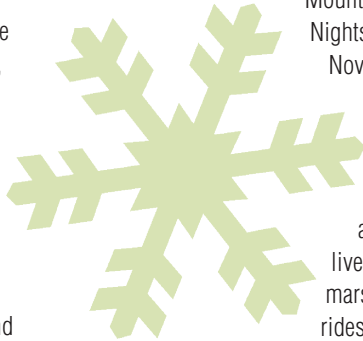
Pingle's in Hampton, really is a destination to be proud of in Durham Region. Tickets are available online or at the door (subject to availability), with prices varying, depending on what activities/foods you choose to consume.

Children under 2 are free.

Visit <https://pinglesfarmmarket.com/christmas-fest-get-tickets/> to find out more.

If you are craving *even more* Christmas farm fun, then hop on over to Brook's Farms in Mount Albert for their Festive Nights event. Beginning November 24th, they offer holiday displays, featuring Elsa from Frozen, The Grinch, and others, a lit Christmas forest, live music, bonfires and marshmallow roasting, wagon rides, a craft market, festive treats and eats, a visit with Santa, and a special Christmas gift for each child.

Tickets are \$24.99 + tax, and can be ordered online from <https://www.brooks farms.com/christmasonthefarm>



Save the date!



■ Guelph Organic Conference

The #GuelphOrganicConference is happening from January 24th to 27th, 2024 at the University of Guelph. Theme ~ *Bring Organic Home: Cultivating Community in a Changing Climate*. Access to the trade show is free, however attendance at the seminars comes at a cost. Full details available at <https://guelphorganicconf.ca/>

You can get your tickets at a discount with the Early Bird Special until December 31, 2023.

■ DIG's Annual General Meeting

To be held Thursday, March 28, 2024 at Salvation Army Oshawa Temple, located at 570 Thornton Rd. North, Oshawa, beginning at 7 pm. Come early to connect with fellow community gardeners, as well as our keynote speaker and DIG board members.

■ Durham Food System Report Card to be released soon

Durham Food Policy Council to release the first Durham Food System Report Card, date and time TBA.

Compost - because a rind is a terrible thing to waste.

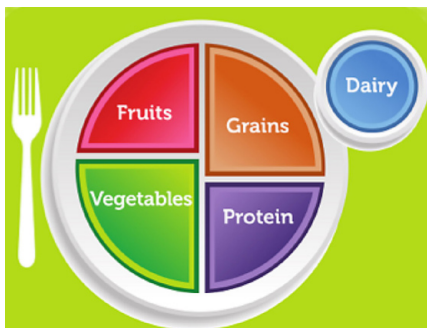
Connecting our youth to the food system

Here are some shocking statistics about the state of food nutrition today:

- On average, 70% of a child's diet is made up of ultra-processed food
- A study in the UK asked 27,500 children ages 5 to 16 and found that nearly a third think that cheese is made from plants
- Over one third of kids eat fast food on any given day, or 13.8 % of their daily calories
- As of 2017, 30% of children aged 5-17 in Canada are overweight or obese
- Kids now consume 25x more candy and 30x more soft drinks than they did in 1950
- 92% of children consume more saturated fat than is recommended
- 86% consume too much sugar
- 72% consume too much salt
- 96% do not get enough fruit and vegetables.
- Canada is the only country in the G7 without a national school food program
- A UNICEF report card ranked Canada 37th out of 41 among the world's richest countries when it comes to providing healthy food for kids

While these stats clearly do not apply to everyone, the trends in the data are clear – our kids are addicted to junk food!

All hope is not lost however, as health and physical education curriculum in Ontario place a heavy focus on healthy eating and daily, sustained exercise. The recent rejigging of Canada's Food Guide, released in January 2019, emphasizes the importance of fruits and vegetables, which make up ½ of the eating plan, shaped like a dinner plate, for simplicity sake. Our neighbours to the south, courtesy of the Department of Agriculture, have a slightly different take on their food guide, with a great emphasis on the consumption of vegetables and dairy.



School boards and food banks across our province have been stepping up to provide breakfasts and healthy snacks, free of charge, to food insecure students. Food banks are seeing an increase in the number of clients, with 587,000 adults and children having visited the province's food banks a total of 4.3 million times between April 1, 2021, and March 31, 2022, with about 30% of food bank clients under the age of 18.

Unfortunately, there is no universally structured program, which means some schools offer meals, while others provide snacks, and some may not offer food at all. Advocacy groups, teachers' unions and food banks are all calling on the government to guarantee that schools have sufficient infrastructure, resources and funding to deliver the meals, since the majority operate on a volunteer basis.

More good news: on November 1st, MP Serge Cormier's Private Member Bill - an act to develop a national framework to establish a school food program - was discussed in

the House of Commons. The following day, MP Julie Dabrusin read a petition from the Coalition for Healthy School Food in the House of Commons to call on the government to include an investment in a national school food program in next year's budget.

Proper care and nutrition of kids must start at home, as children only spend a fraction of their day at school. Parents can rent a community garden plot, buy a small garden box or plant pot, soil and seeds and help kids plant and watch something green grow. Kids will learn to appreciate the time and effort that it takes to grow food with hands-on experience. Pick-your-own farms and local farmers' markets connect kids directly to farms and farmers, who can explain to your kids how they grow their food and which foods are in season. Finally, involve your child in the decision making process, and let them choose a vegetable or fruit to take home and cook under your supervision.

See this season's Agri-Heroes for destinations this winter!

For the birds

Have you ever wondered what it takes for our fine feathered friends to survive our long, cold winters?

Birds are masters at adaptation; they grow downy feathers, build cozy nests in sheltered woodlots and hedgerows, and change their diets to match the seasonal availability.

When food is abundant during the spring, summer, and fall, many species of birds seek out protein rich insects, fat and sugar-filled berries and seeds, and many other manner of foodstuff.

As the days grow shorter, and the nights turn colder, birds are less able to find sweet treats in their preferred environment. Because of habitat loss, we humans have caused some degree of turmoil as we cut back perennials laden with seed pods, trim and dig up native shrubs and trees, and generally make a tough go of it for those flighty friendly avifauna.

Bird counts are down across North America yet everyone with a bit of greenspace in their yard can do their part in encouraging songbirds in staying alive and actually thriving all winter long. Most know about bird feeders, and nesting boxes, but did you know that sources of fat are extremely scarce come winter?



Photos from Woodlogger, Garden Stew & Who Needs A Cape?

We can make simple DIY suet feeders to ensure birds like nuthatches, chickadees, flickers, woodpeckers, blue jays, wrens, goldfinches, titmice, cardinals and brown thrashers get the nutrients they need all winter long. Suet is the raw, hard fat of beef, lamb or mutton found around the loins and kidneys, similar to lard. Yet vegetable fats like peanut butter can also lend itself here.

You will need 16 oz lard 16 ounces of natural (no sugar added) crunchy peanut butter, 1 cup of cornmeal, 1 cup of flour, and 2-4 cups total of your preferred add-ins such as cracked corn, sunflower seeds or hearts, wild bird seed blend, dried fruit pieces such as apples, blueberries or cranberries (no sugar added), and more.

The method is simple: In a large bowl, add the lard, peanut butter, cornmeal, flour and the add-ins you chose. Using your hands, mix everything together and incorporate all the dry ingredients well. Make sure the cornmeal and flour are mixed throughout to help hold everything together. End result: a nice sticky ball of dough.

Place the dough on wax or parchment paper over top of a baking sheet. Flatten the dough and make a rectangle. Place the baking sheet in the freezer for between 2 and 4 hours. Next, remove and slice the frozen rectangle into individual cakes, ensuring that the size of the rectangle matches the caged suet feeder you have on hand. Wrap the 3 extra suet cakes in the paper and store in the freezer until ready to refill your cage. This recipe makes 4 standard blocks.

GardenTip

Mmmm... mushrooms!

This winter try fruiting mushrooms! I trialed Lion's Mane, a unique but easy to grow mushroom purchased for \$30 (+shipping) from GrowMushroomsCanada. If you are looking for a more local choice, HyHope Farms sells their logs for \$30 as well.

Place the log on an old cookie tray. With a knife, make an X slice on the side, near the top. Use a large, clear plastic bag, and tent it over

the log and tray. Twice daily, remove the tent and mist the entire thing, especially where the hole is (that's where the mushroom will pop out). Watch and wait – see below.

But what to do with your white, lovely harvest? Shred the lion's mane mushrooms and cook over high heat (using butter or oil) so they do not become rubbery in texture. Season with salt and pepper and set aside. When you are done making your chosen recipe (a

stir fry, roast, omelette etc.), add the cooked mushrooms back in and serve immediately.

What's all the fuss about Lion's Mane? Lion's Mane mushrooms contain zinc, potassium, calcium, and are good for your digestion. In Asian countries, it is used for memory loss, anxiety, as an anti-inflammatory, and as an immune system booster, even directly on minor wounds. Like magic!

<https://growmushroomscanada.ca/faq/>



Here is what the log looked like on November 14.



On November 23, there were signs of life.



Finally, on November 26, the mushroom burst forth.



On December 1st, another friend made an appearance.



As of writing (December 8), here is the Lion's Mane.

GardenTip

The noble carrot is this season's garden superstar

Over the growing season, I have really focused my attention on this common yet delicious vegetable. Beginning in early April (the 14th to be precise) I sowed a long row of Scarlet Nantes (coreless) organic seeds from McKenzie & the Whitby-Ajax Garden Project, who donated a plethora of goodies at our March 2023 Annual General Meeting. I was enjoying carrots by early July, after much toil and trouble, as it was a hot and dry time. The reward of biting into a crisp, sweet, long carrot was worth it!

Fast Forward to August 2, 2023, after the heat of summer was waning, I decided to sow my Autumn crop of the exact same variety. Slow to get going, the bright green seedlings emerged after **a lot** of watering (again, it's been a dry season). Blessed with a hot Fall, the crop did exceptionally well, and the germination rate was about 90%. The great thing about growing carrots in our climate is that frost sweetens the root. I've let my carrots stay in the garden, and as long as the ground is not completely frozen, they can remain in place, to extend their shelf life.

A member of the Apiaceae/umbelliferae family of plants, which also includes such rockstars as parsley, celery, and dill, carrots have a long and storied history as a culinary counterpart, tracing its roots (pun intended) back to Afghanistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan — about 1,100 years ago. There is even evidence that the Ancient Romans were enjoying carrots too. In the 1600s, the Dutch managed to brighten

the carrot to the orange hue we know and love today.

But what's all the fuss about? Why are carrots behind only potatoes and onions in terms of vegetable consumption popularity? Nutritionally speaking, carrots offer a host of benefits, including the ones you already know: good for eyesight thanks to the Vitamin A/ Beta Carotene, and fibre, a mixture of soluble and insoluble. The soluble kind, about 2.4 g/ cup, are utilized by your gut bacteria, keeping your cells happy. What's more, carrots are also anti-cancer (they help cells defend against angiogenesis), and DNA-protecting, immunity-stimulating, and so on.

I grew my carrots surrounded by sage, onion, and peas, and all performed well. Radishes, cilantro, marigold, and borage are also great universal companion plants. Avoid growing your carrots next to dill, parsnips, and fennel, and 2024 can be your year of carrot!



Greenbelt update

The Ontario government has reinstated protections in the Greenbelt Act and the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP) Act. But the protections of the Central Pickering Development Plan were not reinstated and the Agricultural Minister's Zoning Order, which had previously protected the land, was also not returned.

Representatives from Stop Sprawl Durham and the Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition headed to Queen's Park recently to let Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Paul Calandra and Pickering-Uxbridge MPP Peter Bethlenfalvy know they are only halfway there, calling on them to finish the job.

The Central Pickering Development Plan provides additional protections for both the Seaton Natural Heritage System and DRAP lands. Its policies ensure the DRAP and Rouge Park regions together make a viable agricultural system.

Unfortunately, the Ontario NDP's attempts to have the two pieces of protection returned were unsuccessful after Calandra said it would be redundant to return them.

The advocacy groups disagree and believe by these protections not returning as promised, the DRAP could possibly be developed after the next Greenbelt review in 2025, and that Pickering may abandon its obligations to hold the lands in perpetuity.

Recipe

Cream of carrot soup



Ingredients

- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 onion (medium size)
- 1 clove garlic
- 3 cups sliced carrots (about 6 medium size)
- 1 potato, peeled and diced
- 1 1/4 cup chicken broth
- 1 1/4 cup water
- 3/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp dried tarragon leaves
- 1/8 tsp pepper
- 1 cup milk

Method

Use a large saucepan.

- sauté onions and garlic in butter for 5 minutes
- add carrots and potatoes; stir to coat with butter
- add broth, water, salt, tarragon and pepper
- cover and simmer over medium heat until veggies are well-cooked (15-25 minutes)
- puree using a stick blender, until smooth
- add milk
- heat through and serve

DigThis!

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