

# GREEN INVESTMENT – old style

- By Robin Reily



## Go Nuts

Sometimes an investment sits stagnant, year after year, then one year, soars. That also happens with perennial plants.

Our bumper crop this year was hazelnuts. We planted several shrubs six years ago with only a handful of nuts to show.

This year, for two weeks, I was climbing a ladder each day to gather nut clusters. The stock market acronym FOMO is short for Fear Of Missing Out. It refers to the tendency to buy a stock because everyone else is buying it and you don't want to miss out (e.g., cannabis companies).

Last year the nut harvest looked promising but on harvest day we gazed upon mounds of split shells beneath each shrub, with chattering chipmunks seemingly gloating from the adjacent forest.

Motivate by FOMO this year, we decided to pick our first bucket of nuts in late August. The easiest ways to collect fully mature hazel nuts is to wait until they drop (a 'windfall profit') but we didn't want to be scooped by chipmunks and blue jays. Precaution got the better of us, as the first nuts were under-developed but the later ones were fine. Next year we will wait a week and share.

Hazelnuts, genus *Corylus*, are members of the Birch family. The resemblance is evident in the long catkins (male pollen tubes) which hang down in late winter.

The nuts come in a large European variety (aka filberts) and a smaller American type. The European ones benefit from centuries of breeding but are more frost sensitive. They also suffer from a destructive blight caught from their American cousins.

Nut breeders in Niagara and the Finger Lakes have been interbreeding the two types to improve cold hardiness and blight resistance. Selective breeding and a warming climate now make it feasible to grow hazel nuts in southern Ontario.

As evidence of this change, Ferrero Roche, the makers of the chocolate hazelnut spread 'Nutella', have opened a

factory in Brantford to draw from Ontario and New York new hazelnut farms.

If you'd like to invest some time and money in this crop buy several different cultivars. Although hazel nuts have both male and female parts they are not self-fertile, so you need at least

two ideally different cultivars for good wind-pollination. Perhaps purchase some cold-tolerant plants with smaller nuts and some with larger nuts pushing the edge of your growing zone.

As an added winter precaution plant these shrubs beside a windbreak and deeply mulch the shallow roots. Hazel nuts respond well to pruning.

Cutting off any sideways growing shoots at ground level will encourage stronger upright growth. Incidentally, the cuttings are favoured for water dowsing rods.

Once harvested, let the nuts sit in the sun for a day and then dry inside for a few weeks. In the shell, the nuts keep for several months. Once shelled

roasting will improve the taste. September is the month when you can feel overwhelmed with ripe vegetables—how nice to be able to grow a protein source that stays fresh until snow falls.



*If you don't want to grow your own, you can buy hazel nuts for a couple of dollars or alternately, look for 'deer nuts' which you'll always find to be under a 'buck'.*



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