NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS
Income Opportunities From the Forest Understory
What are Non-Timber Forest Products?

There are many resources other than timber that can be managed, cultivated, and harvested from the forest. Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP’s) include a variety of edible, medicinal, and ornamental crops. The most common products include medicinal herbs, mushrooms, berries, nuts, maple syrup, wildflowers, and floral greens. By identifying the NTFP species found in your forest, you can enjoy the bounty of nature while adding to your income.

Forest Grown Botanicals

Forest botanicals are medicinal and economically valuable species that have traditionally been wild-harvested to fill market demand. The history of wild harvesting has led to decreasing populations and scarcity for many of the most valuable species, especially ginseng and goldenseal.

Today, these species are being sustainably grown for profit under the forest canopy. Licensed buyers in your state are purchasing these plants in response to increased demand for natural medicines both domestically and abroad. Some of the species in highest demand are ginseng, goldenseal, bloodroot and black cohosh. A site assessment of possible growing sites in your woodlot can give you an idea of which species are best suited to your land.
Forest Mushrooms

Many people enjoy foraging for wild mushrooms like morels, chicken-of-the woods, and chanterelles. Their unique flavors, seasonality, and nutritional benefits make them more profitable than the common button mushroom. Although these species are typically wild-harvested, there are other gourmet fungi that can be cultivated to enhance production and profitability.

Shiitake and oyster mushrooms are two of the most popular species being grown. Small diameter logs are inoculated with commercially produced spawn, and then put in a shady spot where they will produce for several years. Mushroom spawn are inexpensive and easily purchased from commercial producers.
Other Forest Foods

Maple syrup is one of the most familiar NTFPs made in the United States. Syrup can be sustainably produced each year by using proper tapping techniques and sugar bush management.

Other trees and shrubs can also provide unique flavorings as teas and spices, such as sassafras and spicebush. Additional forest foods like pawpaws, raspberries, blackberries, black walnut, hickory, and butternuts can provide seasonal opportunities year round.
Ramps

Ramps are members of the onion family and have an aroma and flavor similar to garlic. Ramps are culturally bound to the Appalachian region with centuries of use. For hundreds of years settlers, foragers, and families have harvested ramps from the wild for food and income.

Although this species is typically wild-harvested, it is possible to create a patch in your forest with transplants or by planting seeds.
Getting Started

Before you start producing NTFP’s, it is important to take stock of what you already have in your forest, and then create a plan for what you want to enhance, cultivate, and harvest.

Each NTFP has its own special needs. Some require certain amounts of sun, shade, or moisture. Gathering information before planting is an important part of the process. Everything you learn about identifying, growing, marketing, and processing these species will help you become a more successful producer. It is important never to consume or sell products that have not been properly identified.

Here are some resources to help you get started:

• Growing & Marketing Ginseng, Goldenseal and Other Woodland Medicinals by Scott Persons & Jeanine Davis.


• NTFP Information Exchange www.ifcae.org/ntfp/manage/

• Rural Action Forestry Program www.ruralaction.org/forestry/ntfp.html
Additional Resources

Web Publications:

Ohio State University Extension—Ginseng Resources
http://ohioline.osu.edu/

Penn State University Ginseng Publications
http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/wildplant/ ginsengpublications.aspx

Penn State University Goldenseal Publications
http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/wildplant/ goldenseal_publications.aspx

Natural Medicines of North Carolina—Growers Guides
http://www.naturalmedicinesofnc.org/

How We Can Help

Site Visit Consultations are designed to help landowners identify the best growing sites on their property, and identify existing NTFP’s on the property.

Phone Consultations can help you answer your questions regarding NTFP production and get resources to help fulfill your management goals.

Planting Stock Sales - Cultivation of high-value forest botanicals can be one of the best ways to enhance income earning potential from the forest understory. See the back cover for details about Rural Action’s Planting Stock Program.
Rural Action Planting Stock Program

Rural Action has been offering high quality goldenseal rootlets, and stratified ginseng seeds for planting since 1999.

We begin taking orders in August and continue excepting orders while supplies last. Seeds are delivered in plenty of time for fall planting. Discounts are available for bulk orders, members of Rural Action and the Roots of Appalachia Growers Association.

For additional details about seed shipping, delivery, and pricing contact: tanner@ruralaction.org or at 740-767-4938