Small Scale Solutions for your Farm

Forest Farming

Do You Have Problems with:

- Lack of short-term income from land
- Dedicated to long-term forest production
- Lack of diversity of marketable crops or products harvested from your land
- Taking advantage of non-traditional or high-value specialty markets

Forest Farming Can Help!

Forest farming can help diversify your land and make your land more profitable.

Purposes and Benefits of Forest Farming

- Provides farm income while trees are maturing and being managed
- Diversifies sources of farm income with non-timber forest products on forestland
- Provides a regular supply of food, medicinal plants, ornamentals, and other non-timber products, while improving forest productivity and health
- Increases plant diversity by growing a variety of crops that occupy different layers of the canopy, heights and forms on the same area
- Decreases harvest pressure on naturally occurring non-timber forest products
- Allows production of plants that may have harvest limits for natural populations

Forest Understory Crops

Ensure fencing is suitable for the type of livestock on your property and meets local and state fence laws. The plan and design of the fence should be use and site specific. Consult your local NRCS office on the most appropriate design for the planned purpose.
Types of Forest Understory Crops

The following crops fall into four general categories:

- Foods—such as fruits, nuts, berries, greens, and mushrooms
- Medicines and Herbal Supplements—such as ginseng, echinacea, goldenseal, black cohosh, and witch hazel
- Decorative Products—such as flowers, Spanish moss, vines, stems, seed heads, leaves, and fruiting structures used in floral arrangements
- Handicrafts and Specialty Woods—such as grape vines and branches

Establishment Considerations

Many of the plant species grown in Forest Farming operations can demand a very high price. However, seeds and roots to establish these plants might also be expensive to obtain and some species require a number of years before the first harvest can be made. Before investing time and money into growing a particular forest understory crop, consider the following:

- Locate a source of technical expertise to assist you
- Obtain production and processing information
- Locate or develop potential markets

Marketing Considerations

Producers must be sure there are adequate markets for selling their products before entering into any new enterprise. Many of the common products, such as fruits, nuts, berries, greens, and mushrooms can be marketed to local grocery stores, restaurants or at roadside stands. Other specialty products, such as ginseng and herbal supplements will require finding buyers who may or may not be local.
**Associated Costs**

The cost of installing this type of operation will be specific to your land depending on the amount of tree thinning needed to achieve the desired amount of shade, and the underbrush thinning and pruning required to make room for the forest understory crop. Additional costs depend on the amount of site preparation needed and the cost to establish the desired crop.

Ginseng (above) root is a high-value product. American ginseng grows on shady, moist, and well-drained sites. North and east facing slopes are most commonly associated with good growing locations. Yellow poplar is a good indicator of a suitable site for growing ginseng.

Forest Farming includes the encouragement or production of nuts, berries and fruits that occur naturally in forests. Pawpaw (flower and fruit below), serviceberry, and blackberry are examples of forest understory plants that can be managed for increased production.
Technical and Financial Help Is Available

Whether you measure your farm in terms of feet or acres, your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office has experienced conservationists that can help you develop a Conservation Plan to conserve, maintain, and restore the natural resources on your land and improve the long-term health of your operation.

There is no charge for our assistance. Simply contact your local office to set up an appointment. You may also be eligible to receive financial assistance. Your NRCS office will explain any programs that are available so you can make the best decision for your operation. All NRCS programs and services are voluntary.

For More Information

Visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service or visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find your local NRCS office. You can also check with your local USDA Service Center, then make an appointment to determine next steps for your conservation goals.

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