

## Non Timber Forest Products

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As you walk your land do you look up or down?

Many Virginian landowners walk their properties periodically to decide what changes they want to make to improve their productivity. For too long, farmers, landowners, and forest managers have only looked up, calculating how many board feet of timber the land will yield in twenty or thirty years. Especially in these hard economic times, they could be managing their land more intensively by looking down as well. Appalachian forests, like many other forests, are undervalued and underutilized if only managed for timber yield. Non-Timber Forest Products, or NTFPs, have been an integral part of Virginia's rich heritage providing subsistence and/or supplemental income to rural households for centuries and they could become an important new source of revenue for traditional landowners.



Landowners plant medicinal herbs at McCormick Farm in Rockbridge County. Photo by: John Munsell, Virginia Tech.

But, what, exactly, are NTFPs? Simply, they are all of the usable parts of a forest (or natural areas) that are not lumber. NTFPs include, but are not limited to, minerals, plants, plant parts, and fungi. The four most common uses for these products are: decorative, florals and seasonal greens, culinary, medicinal and dietary supplements. More importantly though, is how can a landowner benefit from NTFPs?



Goldenseal (circled in photo) is a valuable NTFP landowners in Virginia can grow. Photo by: Matt Yancey, Virginia Tech.

By developing a land management plan that includes the cultivating and harvesting of NTFPs as well as timber, a landowner can increase income between rotations. If land has become damaged by fire or storm, the damaged timber can be used for products such as hardwood charcoals, which is a significant new market. The forest owner can then increase productivity in these areas by planting a greater variety of herbaceous and woody species

that would appeal to the medicinal and culinary markets or by farming berries in open areas post-harvest. By implementing a land management program that combines best timber practices with innovative non-timber practices, landowners will reap greater financial rewards from their land as they access new markets for Appalachian native products

Landowners and managers can find out more about these products and practices by contacting local Extension agents, who offer low-cost or free workshops to help farmers get started cultivating NTFPs. Interested landowners can access the latest information about these products and their uses by subscribing to *Small Farm Digest*, contacting the Plant Conservation Alliance, or finding their local Community Sustainable Agriculture group. All Virginians, whether as landowners, harvesters or consumers, can benefit by promoting and selling these valuable crops. We can increase our Appalachian hardwood forest's sustainability, strengthen the market for local products, and contribute to our community's bounty and fertility.

- Find your local Extension agent by visiting the Virginia Cooperative Extension website [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)
- Subscribe to the *Small Farm Digest* at <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/newsroom/newsletters/smallfarmdigest/sfd.html>
- Contact the Bureau of Land Management's Plant Conservation Alliance at: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/>
- Find your local Community Sustainable Agriculture group at: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown/index.shtml>

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