



# Non-Timber Forest Products

Christopher Reeves, Forestry

When woodland owners think of harvesting resources from their woodlands, the first thing they often think of is timber. Cutting down and selling trees can dominate the discussion when it comes to potential financial gains from woodlands. But there are other products that can come from small woodlands that may also have a commercial market. These products are often referred to as non-timber forest products or specialty forest products.

## Edibles

The most common non-timber forest product from woodlands is food or edibles. All types of edibles can be used personally or packaged and sold locally at farmers markets. But the most important thing to remember is there are poisonous animals, plants, mushrooms, and fruits in woodlands. If you are not 100% sure that the food is safe, don't eat it! The most obvious woodland fruit is blackberries and blueberries from native shrubs or vines growing in the understory or along roads. Fruits from pawpaw trees are available sometime from late August to early October from trees that generally grow in the shade in moist, rich environments. Their flavor has been described as a combination of a banana and a mango.



Blueberries are a common non-timber forest product.

Nuts can also be collected for food and commercial purposes. Black walnuts are the most popular and should be picked up off the ground as soon as possible after they fall in September or October. Walnuts must have their hull removed to get to the nutmeat inside. Commercial hullers are available to the general public and by visit-

ing [www.black-walnuts.com](http://www.black-walnuts.com) a huller can be found. Oak acorns, hickory nuts, pecans, and beechnuts can also be foraged but most require further processing. There is a limited commercial market for small amounts of these items but personal usage might suit someone's taste buds.

Woodlands could also contain numerous edible mushrooms. Morel mushrooms are the most prized in Kentucky and are found in the eastern United States from April to May. Several other mushroom species are available in the woods but there are possibilities for landowners to grow their own. Shiitake mushrooms can be grown in small commercial operations. The growth medium for shiitake mushrooms is small diameter logs that all woodlands already have. Refer to the publications listed for information on starting an operation. Again with any woodland edible, but especially mushrooms, collectors must be 100% sure on the identification.



Some mushrooms are poisonous such as the *amanita flavoconia*, commonly known as yellow warts, pictured here.

Ellen Crocker, UK Forestry Extension

Maple syrup can be produced from all species of maple and within a natural woodlands. A "sugar bush" can be set up in any woodlands with a large amount of maple trees that are widely spaced with large stem diameters and wide crowns. The bigger the crown and the bigger the diameter of the tree's stem, the more sap is typically produced. Trees should have a minimum diameter of ten inches before tapping. One advantage of maple syrup production is that most of the work takes place in a four to six week window once the operation is set up while sap is flowing in winter.

## Crafts

Small woodlands can produce many products that might have personal or commercial value for crafts. Trees can sometimes produce burls that artists can turn into unique art pieces. Vases, sculptures, art pieces, and



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traditional lumber can be produced from burls. Twigs and vines can be used to create decorations, particularly wreaths. The most common are grape vines and vines from Oriental bittersweet. This plant has red berries that add natural color to wreaths but are an invasive species. Collecting these vines could be indirectly spreading invasive species that are harming our woodlands. Don't use Oriental bittersweet! Consider using native American bittersweet or Virginia creeper.

Conks or bracket mushrooms are fungi that sometimes grow on trees. When harvested and dried they may be carved, painted, and wood burned. Pine cones and other dried material can also be collected for craft purposes. Deer and elk antler sheds can potentially be sold from woodlands. Laws vary by state that dictate regulations related to the possession and selling of these antlers with or without proper permits. Contact your state wildlife agency for more information.



**Local artists might be willing to purchase conk mushrooms for carving, painting, or wood burning.**

Christmas trees can also be cut from woodlands but full scale commercial operations require setting up a Christmas tree plantation. These plantations require specific care and maintenance over many years. Check with the National Christmas Tree Association to find out information about starting a Christmas Tree Farm and find help. Several public lands including national forests sell permits to collect a Christmas tree for personal usage.

## Recreation

Woodlands also provide numerous recreation activities that might produce a small amount of revenue. Hunting leases are increasingly common for woodland owners with a hundred acres or more. These leases restrict hunting to only a few individuals for their private usage. The exclusivity is what makes the hunters willing

to pay for access to private property.

If a woodland has a good trail system, it could be attractive to horseback and ATV riders. Previous timber sales could have created roads and trails through woodlands that the general public may want to ride on for a fee. Woodland owners must consider their legal liability with any action to open up their land (even if limited to a few individuals). Landowners should consult with attorneys



**Horseback riders can enjoy trails even in small woodlands.**

and insurance agents to be sure they are covered for any potential issues. Liability insurance may be required if you charge a fee.

Disappointingly, there is no centralized list of local markets or sources for people who will pay for non-timber forest products. Commercial opportunities are found through peer-to-peer communication and through the internet. When it comes to small scale operations, woodland owners are generally on their own to find buyers. The products and services discussed here may not be as lucrative as selling timber but can provide a small amount of resources for personal use or for selling on an annual basis!

### For More Information

**National Agroforestry Center:**  
<http://nac.unl.edu>

**University of Kentucky  
Department of Forestry:** <http://ukforestry.org>

## References

- Hill, D. 2010. Agroforestry Forest Farming: Have Maples, Will Sugar... University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. FOR-118. 4 p.
- Szymanski, M, D. Hill, and T. Woods. 2002. Potential Profits from a Small-Scale Shiitake Enterprise. University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. FOR-88. 12 p.