



## Farm-to-Forest Connections

**Explore how your woodland can be a beautiful and active part of your farm.**

(From "Farm-to-Forest Connections," by Allaire Diamond & Autumn Foushée, page 2 of 2)

### Woodland Inspiration

- \* National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees, by Elbert Little (Western Region) and National Audubon Society (Eastern Region) (Knopf; Chanticleer Press, 1980)
- \* A Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants: Eastern and Central North America, by Lee Allen Peterson (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999)
- \* Newcomb's Wildflower Guide, by Lawrence Newcomb (Little, Brown and Company, 1989)
- \* Nature's Art Box: From T-shirts to Twig Baskets, 65 Cool Projects for Crafty Kids to Make with Natural Materials You Can Find Anywhere, by Laura C. Martin (Storey Publishing, 2003)
- \* Craft, Inc.: Turn Your Creative Hobby Into a Business, by Meg Mateo Ilasco (Chronicle Books, 2007)
- \* United Plant Savers: an organization dedicated to the protection and sustainable use of wild, medicinal plants
- \* Non-timber Forest Products: resources for non-timber forest products like ginseng, maple syrup and wild mushrooms;
- \* Field & Forest Products: information and materials for mushroom cultivation
- \* Contact your local cooperative extension service, state forestry department or natural resources agency. That's certainly true for Jim and June Wolfe of Wolfe Spring Farm in Sheffield, Mass. Half of their 52-acre farm remains wooded, providing shelter and food for songbirds, salamanders, bobcats, bear and other wildlife. The property, true to its name, features bubbling springs that underlie parts of the forest. These unusual conditions—a forested wetland supplied by groundwater—allow black ash, long sought after by basketmakers, to grow. Skilled basketmakers pound black ash (also called brown ash) logs until the annual growth rings separate. They peel off the rings, split them into fine ribbons and weave baskets from the strong, flexible material.

June and Jim have enough projects going—they raise pigs, lambs, chickens, goats, cows and Honey bees, as well as a market garden that supplies neighbors through a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program—without trying to make baskets. Enter their neighbors: JoAnn Kelly Catsos, a master black-ash basketmaker, and her husband, Steve, who prepares the basket material to JoAnn's exacting standards. The Wolfes and Catsoses have known each other for years; Steve, a carpenter, helped the Wolfes build their solar-powered house, and the families have shared everything from a wood splitter to harvest meals. When JoAnn and Steve approached Jim and June about harvesting black ash trees from Wolfe Spring Farm, it was a no-brainer.

"We trust them absolutely," says June. "It's clear they know exactly what they are doing." The Catsoses harvest a few trees per year from the farm's woodland, and thank June and Jim with—what else?—a basket. JoAnn is known across the country for her intricate miniature baskets, but June, though she loves admiring these tiny works of art, says that she and her husband "tend to like something much more functional." JoAnn, accordingly, made the couple a market basket that holds their fresh-baked bread. The families' relationship is even closer through this artistic forest connection.

### Growing Into the Future

Can your forest offer additional income for your farm? Depending on your land, your region of the country, and the amount of time and money you're willing to invest, it certainly could.

Jim and Lucy McCullough offer running, mountain bike, snowshoe and cross-country ski trails on their historic farm in Williston, Vt. In October, they team up with local organizers and youth actors to host a "haunted forest" full of spooky skits; thousands of people visit their farm—and pay admission—each year. Others who prefer solitary work and a quieter forest might cultivate medicinal ginseng, whose roots can fetch up to hundreds of dollars a pound; try their hand at growing mushrooms for sale to local restaurants; or make maple syrup to sell at the farmers' market.

If you're new to being a forest landowner, you shouldn't undertake larger projects without an expert's guidance. It can save you a lot of time and money and ensure your plan is appropriate and sustainable. Your county forester or local



cooperative extension expert can visit your land and tell you if your forest can support the project you're dreaming of, as well as direct you to helpful resources in your area. They can also help you plan to manage your forest in an environmentally thoughtful way.

Michael Snyder, a county forester in Vermont, says, "It is possible to make terrible mistakes when managing forests. Many landowners have been seriously disappointed by the effects of such mistakes—even with the best of intentions. Careful planning and experienced advice help to avoid such disappointments." The last thing you want is to have the project you were so excited about degrade the forest for future generations. Through thoughtful planning and realistic expectations and by tapping into the vast knowledge-base in your community, your forest can support creative endeavors and become a valued feature, rather than a footnote, of your farm.

About the Authors: Allaire Diamond researches, writes about and consults on non-timber forest products. She lives in Williston, Vt. Autumn Foushée is a freelance writer and natural resources professional based in Burlington, Vt.