Forest Medicinals: A Brief Introduction to Harvesting and Marketing Medicinal Plants from Small Private Forestlands in the Pacific Northwest

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Overview

There is a high demand in the U.S. for natural medicines, particularly in the form of herbal supplements. Since the 1990s, the market for botanicals has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Many of the medicinal plants that supply this giant industry grow wild on forest lands. This report provides a brief introduction to marketing medicinal plants as a potential source of supplemental income for small forestland owners. It briefly describes examples of species with commercial value, general harvesting considerations, and introduces potential markets for these plants.[1]

Devil's club (*Oplopanax horridum*) is an important medicinal found in Pacific Northwest forests.

Box 1. Medicinal Species with Commercial Value from Pacific Northwest Forests

Trees
- Black Walnut
- Hawthorne
- Cascara Sagrada
- Black Elderberry
- Red Elderberry

Shrubs
- Devil's Club
- Dwarf Oregon Grape
- Kinnickinnick
- Tall Oregon Grape

Perennials
- Horsetail
- Mistletoe
- Pipsissewa
- Scotch Broom
- Skunk Cabbage
- Stinging Nettle

Lichen
- Usnea

Forest Medicinals with Commercial Value

There are hundreds of species with medicinal value that grow naturally in Pacific Northwest forests. To exercise greater control over production, however, many of these species are now cultivated under intensive agricultural conditions on farms. Some species, however, are still wild-harvested or grown in semi-wild conditions in forests. Box 1 provides a list of some of these species.

As a forest landowner interested in producing medicinal plants for commercial markets, you may find an abundance of one or more species on your land, or the ideal habitat to nurture a productive supply. If you are unfamiliar with the medicinal plants on your property, hire a professional harvester or wildcrafter[2] to teach you. You can also conduct your own inventory using a plant field guide. Once you have identified commercial species, be sure to note their location on a map and take a photo for your records.

Marketing medicinal plants from your land can be a one-time or opportunistic endeavor, for example, salvaging plants destined to be cleared during a logging operation, or it can be a planned enterprise that is carefully managed for long-term production. If you are interested in producing a steady supply of medicinal species over time, you may need to modify your forest management to encourage production. The act of "tending" the land for a particular species involves minor modifications to the environment (for example, burning a patch of land, thinning an area to adjust light conditions, or clearing competing species). Some landowners may need to conduct more intensive management activities, such as seeding, weeding, irrigating, and/or fertilizing to fulfill their production goals. The degree to which a species is wild-harvested versus tended or cultivated is ultimately up to you, and the amount of energy and inputs you want to put into growing a

[1] More details on marketing wild medicinals can be found in Buttolph, L., Vasquez, S. and E.T. Jones. 2011. Oregon Grape Root Market Analysis: A Business Planning Guide for Small Woodland Owners. Institute for Culture and Ecology. Available free at www.ntfpinfo.us.

[2] Collectors or harvesters of wild medicinal herbs are often referred to as 'wildcrafters.'

Box 2. Harvest guidelines for wild medicinals (www.ahpa.org)

- Select sites where the species is abundant
- Harvest to minimize damage to local habitat
- Harvest larger plants and allow smaller ones to grow
- Avoid sites that have been treated with pesticides, herbicides, other chemicals within the last 3 years
- Avoid sites that may contain heavy metals or other toxins in the soil
- Ensure that nearby water sources are free of contaminants
- Keep equipment and tools clean to prevent cross contamination

product. We recommend striving for low-input management practices that promote the long-term sustainability of the crop and natural system.

Harvesting and Processing

Prior to starting a business producing and marketing medicinal herbs, take time to learn about the guidelines, laws, and regulations pertaining to growing, collecting, processing, and/or marketing medicinal products. The American Herbal Products Association (AHPA)[3], a national trade association and advocacy group for the herbal products industry in the U.S., has a free book of guidelines for growers and collectors of herbal products, entitled "Good Agricultural and Collection Practice for Herbal Raw Materials." This manual (available for free at www.ahpa.org) outlines best practices for propagation, site selection, collection equipment, plant identification, sustainable harvest, post-harvest handling, personnel, record-keeping, and retention samples.

Box 2 lists some harvesting recommendations for wild medicinals. Maintain records of each harvest, including a voucher specimen to verify product identity.[4] Buyers may require that each harvest batch be labeled with the plant name, quantity, batch code and harvest date. Processors are required to keep a sample of all plant materials used to process herbal supplements with the seller's name, date of harvest, lot number, and other information.

Marketing

Begin looking for potential buyers of your product early on in your process and find out what specifications they have for minimum product volume, processing, packaging, and record keeping, as well as their pricing. There are many different types of buyers, depending on the whether you sell your products raw or processed. Consolidation buyers and processors will buy raw or minimally processed (e.g., dried, cut) material. Consolidation buyers are intermediaries who purchase from many producers/harvesters to meet large orders. Processors convert raw material into value-added products (such as teas, capsules, tinctures, powders, or salves). Markets for processed medicinals include specialty and natural food stores, farmers markets, and direct web sales. If you are interested in producing value-added products, be aware that the US Food and Drug Administration requires all manufacturers, processors and packagers of end-use herbal products to register with the agency and comply with current Good Manufacturing Practices for Dietary Supplements[5] to ensure the identity, purity, quality, strength and composition of the dietary supplement, including 100% identity testing. Your local county health department can provide assistance in complying with all local, state and federal food regulations.

Samples of Oregon grape root kept on file at a processing plant.

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USDA United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture

[3] http://www.ahpa.org
[4] To prepare a voucher specimen refer to "Good Agricultural and Collection Practice for Herbal Raw Materials." (www.ahpa.org).
[5] http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/RegulationsLaws/ucm079496.htm

Forest Medicinals: A Brief Introduction to Harvesting and Marketing Medicinal Plants From Small Private Forestlands in the Pacific Northwest. This extension factsheet provides a general introduction to developing commercially valuable medicinal plants on private forestlands. Save to Library. Download.Â Nontimber forest product harvesting in the Pacific Northwest is neither a new activity nor a disappearing relic of the pre-industrial era. Though the emphasis may have shifted from subsistence to commercial and recreational pursuits, more. Nontimber forest product harvesting in the Pacific Northwest is neither a new activity nor a disappearing relic of the pre-industrial era. Medicinal plants, also called medicinal herbs, have been discovered and used in traditional medicine practices since prehistoric times. Plants synthesise hundreds of chemical compounds for functions including defence against insects, fungi, diseases, and herbivorous mammals. Numerous phytochemicals with potential or established biological activity have been identified. However, since a single plant contains widely diverse phytochemicals, the effects of using a whole plant as medicine are uncertain