



U-picks Aren't Just for Farms: A Brief Introduction to Developing Nontimber Forest-Based Tourism Operations on Private Forestlands in the Pacific Northwest

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Overview

Each year, thousands of people descend upon private forests to harvest Christmas trees at U-pick tree farms. Incentives for customers include getting a better price for a tree, spending time in the outdoors, and bonding with family and friends. In addition to Christmas trees, forests offer hundreds of products that can be harvested by visitors. This document provides a brief overview on ways small forestland owners can earn supplemental income by developing opportunities for tourists to harvest nontimber forest products such as mushrooms, edible greens and berries, floral greens, boughs, and medicinal plants from their land.



A truffle-hunting expedition led by a professional can offer a unique recreational experience for tourists.

Market Potential

Typically, “Pick-your-own” or “U-pick” operations are set-aside portions of working farms that allow customers to harvest fresh produce at a low price. Producers benefit by eliminating or reducing the costs of harvesting, packing, and transportation. More recently, U-picks have gained popularity because of their value as a recreational activity that enables urban dwellers to interact with nature and rural life. There is growing recognition that exposure to nature and foraging for food can help improve psychological and physical well-being.^{1,2} As the proportion of Americans living in urban areas increases, there is growing demand for rural retreats.

What does this mean for forestland owners? Forest-based tourism can provide another opportunity for landowners to derive income from their property. The possibilities for forest-based tourism are endless and will depend on the interests and knowledge of the landowner, the type of relationship she/he wishes to have with visitors, and the amount of time, money and resources he/she wants to devote to an operation. Activities may range from hunting, fishing, or camping to mountain biking tours and tree top adventure courses. A U-pick operation might include gathering berries, mushrooms, truffles, medical plants, or decorative forest products. Plants to be harvested might grow wild or might require some level of cultivation or tending. There are hundreds of nontimber forest products that have edible, medicinal, decorative, and cultural value. Box 1 lists some possible U-pick species for Pacific Northwest forests.³

¹ Fuller, R.A., K.N. Irvine, P.Devine-Wright, P.H.Warren, and K.J. Gaston. 2007. Psychological benefits of greenspace increase with biodiversity. *Biology Letters*. 3(4): 390–394.

² Ulrich, R. 1984. View through a window may influence recovery from surgery. *Science*. 224: 420–421.

³ Species selected from listings provided in “Income Opportunities in Special Forest Products: Self-Help Suggestions for Rural Entrepreneurs.” Margaret G. Thomas and David R. Schumann. 1993. USDA-FS AIB 666.



U-pick wild red huckleberries is another option for forestland owners

Additional activities associated with a U-Pick operation might include classes or workshops on processing the collected materials, such as making medicinal tinctures or salves, jams, baskets, or decorative wreaths. A forest-based U-pick will likely differ from a more agricultural farm operation in that access to harvest sites might entail more hiking and the focus may be more on product quality instead of

quantity. For example, a U-pick truffle-hunting operation will likely require a knowledgeable guide who can direct visitors on where to look. Quantities harvested might be minimal, but visitors may derive pleasure from simply being out in the woods and experiencing the process of “hunting” or foraging.

Steps to get started

If you are considering a U-pick operation on your property, the first thing to consider is whether you have the personality to deal pleasantly with visitors (or can hire someone with this personality). Access to your land, including distance to major urban centers and road conditions to your property are also important considerations. Will you need to open up trails on your land or are they already established? Other things to think about include parking and restroom facilities, availability of clean water, liability insurance, promotion and marketing.

To determine what products to offer, you might need to hire a professional wildcrafter, botanist, or forester to inventory your property. If you don't have knowledge or expertise in potential U-Pick products you need to decide whether to educate yourself or to contract with an expert that might be able to lead guided tours. John Kallas of Wild Food Adventures provides expertise in wild edible plants and leads guided tours and expeditions (www.wildfoodadventures.com). Other possibilities might include contracting with professional herbalists or florists who have experience leading collection tours. Consult your local extension agent for feedback and advice.

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Potential U-Pick Species found in Pacific Northwest Forests

Berries

- Blackberry
- Elderberry
- Huckleberry
- Lingonberry
- Oregon grape
- Salal berry
- Salmonberry
- Serviceberry
- Thimbleberry
- Wild plum

Edible greens/roots/tubers

- Camas
- Chickweed
- Fiddlehead fern
- Miner's lettuce
- Nettle
- Watercress

Medicinals

- Cascara bark
- Elder flower and berry
- Ginseng root
- Oregon grape root
- Plantain
- St. John's wort
- Wild ginger root

Edible fungi

- Chanterelle mushrooms
- Bolete mushrooms
- Hedgehog mushrooms
- Morels
- Matsutake
- Oregon black truffle
- Oregon white truffle

Weaving and Dying Materials

- Alder bark
- Cattail
- Beargrass
- Black or brown ash
- Douglas-fir
- Hemlock
- Lichen
- Oak bark
- White birch bark
- Willow

Decorative/Floral Materials

- Conifer boughs
- Salal boughs
- Oregon grape boughs
- Pine cones