



News of the Oaks

A New Business at Twin Oaks: Growing and Selling Native Plants

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by Valerie

We're in a busy time of year. The garden is bursting and we're ensconced in several building projects.

Building: we're re-vamping an existing structure to become a storage facility for seeds for our heirloom, organic seed business (part of [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#)) to provide additional climate-controlled storage space for seeds.

The bigger building project is rebuilding our residence Harmony, following an electrical fire this past winter. We are so grateful no-one was hurt. The fire itself affected 2 rooms and a part of our Community Clothes facility; the majority of the damage was from smoke and water.



General Community News:

- After having a Waiting List, we now find ourselves on the lower-population end of the membership cycle. We are continuing to offer [Visitor Periods](#) throughout the fall. Please let us know if you are interested in visiting! We

are especially looking for women and non-binary visitors right now.

- Our Seeds business is in full swing—we just mailed out the biggest order we've ever processed! Moving the Seeds business to a new workspace, along with solid management, has improved the work flow and strengthened the business overall.
- Our hammocks business is continuing to sell off remaining inventory through our [website](#), and we are also collaborating with our sister community [East Wind](#) as they are making a small number of rope hammocks for us.
- Our Racial Equity Team is in the process of re-forming, as a number of the people on the team had their terms end simultaneously. The new team is working on coordinating their specific focus for the new team. Generally speaking, as a white-majority community, we are aiming to change and create structures that are more inclusive and result a more diverse range of people finding this a comfortable place to live our values of income-sharing, etc.
- There is now a local "small communities potluck" that happens periodically, with several other intentional communities near us in our county meeting up for mutual support and just to have fun together.



Our cows grazing under our one of our photovoltaic arrays

A New Business at Twin Oaks: Growing and Selling Native Plants

by Irena

Perhaps most people think that there aren't a lot of edible species native to the Eastern US, besides pawpaws, persimmons, and blighted chestnuts. But experienced foragers know that there are many delicious native plants, and Native Americans know that the landscapes of this continent have been diversely cultivated for millennia.

These days, there are lots of nurseries that mostly sell native plants, as evidenced by the list on the Virginia Native Plant Society website, and on the other websites of state native plant societies. But most of these nurseries say little if anything about which of the species they're selling are edible for humans.

I want this business to be about plants and seeds of species that are native to the Southeastern US. I want to mostly focus on species that are also useful to humans as food, medicine, crafting material, and/or cover crops. I want to mostly or entirely focus on specified Southeastern ecotypes (locally adapted populations) thus meeting currently unmet needs of restoration ecologists and educating the public about the reasons for using local/regional ecotypes. Probably most of these will be of species that are uncommon on the market.

This year I have planted about 30 species at Lawson Land, for observation, seed collection, and occasional eating. I've continued tending various other species that I planted in the past couple years that overwinter. And I've started selling plants at the local Farmers' Market in Mineral. Some examples are *Rudbeckia laciniata* (Sochan), *Eragrostis spectabilis* (Purple Lovegrass), *Sium suave* (Water Parsnip), *Physalis longifolia* (Longleaf Ground Cherry), and *Sagittaria latifolia* (Catniss).

I plan to sell a large portion of our seeds and seedlings, likely at least half. At the same time, in respect for traditions of gift-giving and non-monetization, I hope to also distribute our products, in significant quantities, through channels other than sale. Such other channels include bartering some in exchange for products of other regenerative farms, bartering some in exchange for services of our neighbors, and giving some away, such as to tribal initiatives, food pantries, and school gardens.



Irena, new Native Plants business

Most of our customers will be people planting on small scales, either in home gardens or on small farms. They will likely include food forest creators, silvo-pasturists, vegetable and herb growers in search of diversified crops, and ecological restoration practitioners. In addition, I'd like to discuss the possibility of selling at wholesale rates with several plant nurseries.

And when we include native species, we can help create (or restore) agricultural systems that are more supportive of native wildlife.

Twin Oaks Native Plants is incubating under the Seed Growing work area, which mostly grows seeds for Common Wealth Seed Growers. Other related agricultural work areas at Twin Oaks include the food garden, the orchards, and the herb garden.s