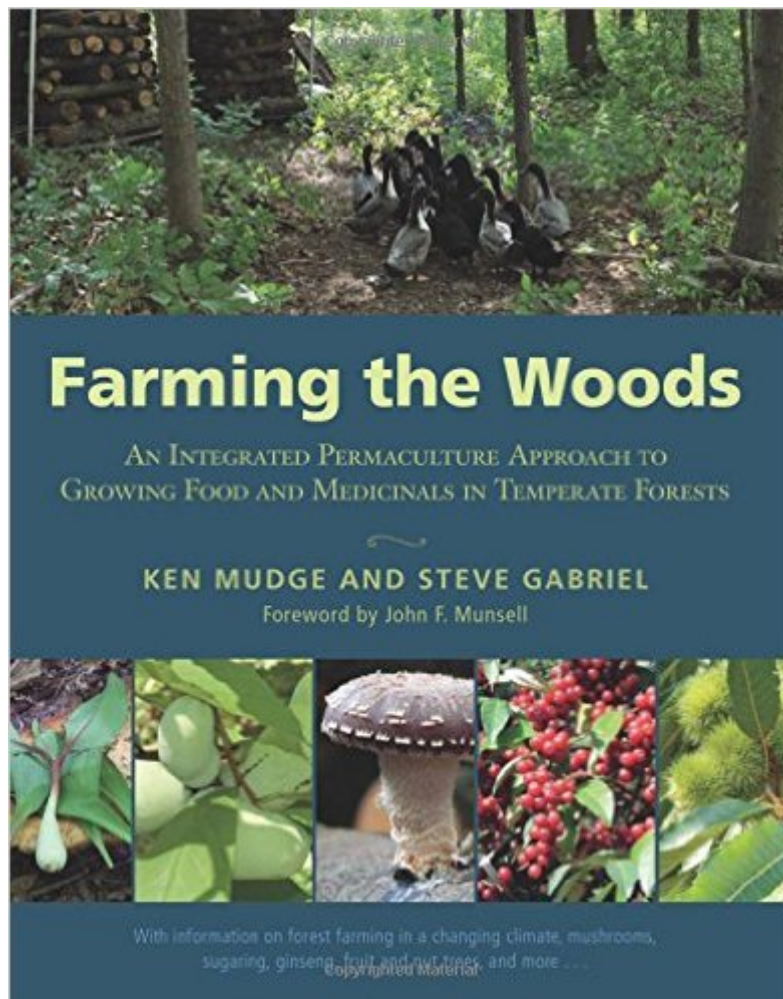


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# Farming The Woods: An Integrated Permaculture Approach To Growing Food And Medicinals In Temperate Forests



## Synopsis

In the eyes of many people, the practices of forestry and farming are mutually exclusive, because in the modern world, agriculture involves open fields, straight rows, and machinery to grow crops, while forests are primarily reserved for timber and firewood harvesting. *Farming the Woods* invites a remarkably different perspective: that a healthy forest can be maintained while growing a wide range of food, medicinal, and other non-timber products. While this concept of "forest farming" may seem like an obscure practice, history indicates that much of humanity lived and sustained itself from tree-based systems in the past; only recently have people traded the forest for the field. The good news is that this is not an either-or scenario; forest farms can be most productive in places where the plow is not: on steep slopes, and in shallow soils. It is an invaluable practice to integrate into any farm or homestead, especially as the need for unique value-added products and supplemental income becomes more and more important for farmers. Many already know that daily indulgences we take for granted such as coffee, chocolate, and many tropical fruits, all originate in forest ecosystems. But few know that such abundance is also available in the cool temperate forests of North America. *Farming the Woods* is the first in-depth guide for farmers and gardeners who have access to an established woodland and are looking for productive ways to manage it. Authors Ken Mudge and Steve Gabriel describe this process as "productive conservation," guided by the processes and relationships found in natural forest ecosystems. *Farming the Woods* covers in detail how to cultivate, harvest, and market high-value non-timber forest crops such as American ginseng, shiitake mushrooms, ramps (wild leeks), maple syrup, fruit and nut trees, ornamental ferns, and more. Comprehensive information is also offered on historical perspectives of forest farming; mimicking the forest in a changing climate; cultivation of medicinal crops; creating a forest nursery; harvesting and utilizing wood products; the role of animals in the forest farm; and how to design and manage your forest farm once it's set up. This book is a must-read for farmers and gardeners interested in incorporating aspects of agroforestry, permaculture, forest gardening, and sustainable woodlot management into the concept of a whole-farm organism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I really wanted to give this book five stars. The photos are riveting and I love the fact that the authors of the book have really tried many of the techniques they write about. There's some good information on which plants will \*really\* produce fruits in shade (not many) and an excellent analysis of which non-timber forest products will make a good income (shiitakes, maple syrup, ginseng, chestnuts, and hazelnuts). Plus, I really loved Ken Mudge's free pdf about shiitake mushroom production (search for "Best Management Practices for Log-Based Shiitake Cultivation in the Northeastern United States"), so he gets a free star unrelated to this book. So why only four stars? Farming the Woods is too long and too expensive. I didn't have the same length complaint with the much longer Edible Forest Gardens, but the primary author of Farming the Woods is a college professor, and it shows in his sometimes dry and academic writing. If you've already heard of forest ecology, climate change, and permaculture, you're not going to get anything out of the first 80 pages nor the last 30, which adds up to a full third of the book that I would have cut out (and there are other long sections in the interim that could have used excising). And at a cost of nearly \$30 even after lowers the price tag, this is a book I would have preferred to check out of a library. The bottom line is that I don't really recommend this book to most readers. If you're like me and absolutely must read every book on the subject, you'll likely find a few gems in these pages, but otherwise, I'd recommend checking out Extension Service websites on the topics of non-timber forest products, silvopasture, and so forth. Chances are you'll get most of the same information at a much lower cost --- free.

"Farming the Woods" by Steve Gabriel and Ken Mudge is a comprehensive and inspiring book. But it is also practical one. If you are planning to break a sweat - to do the intellectual and physical labor of designing and creating a forest-farm landscape - this book will provide the "nuts and bolts" in a style that is useful and accessible. At the same time it will support your sense of the importance of

such a large endeavor with a consistent emphasis on the broader context - a future that demands new frameworks for understanding our relationship with the natural world. As it moves between big picture and microcosm, case study and theory, the book manages to be practical, detailed, engaging and sweeping - all at the same time! The book starts in the past but shows a powerful sense of responsibility for the future. In a short introductory section about the history of human interactions with northern temperate-forest ecosystems the authors demonstrate an incisive perspective on the complex weave of those historical relationships. Then, in the following section, they announce a clear-eyed focus on an even more complex future - on the undeniable fact of climate change that will redefine our relationships with the changing landscapes around us for decades or centuries to come. Without shying away from the realities of the challenges we face, the book moves forward to consider how forest farming can contribute to ending and possibly mending the damage of the fossil-fuel era. This long-term view is an important secondary benefit of a forest-farming perspective. Unlike the design of this year's vegetable garden, if you are designing within the forest realm you must take a longer view of things - often a view that spans generations. The practical core of the book comes to the fore with extensive chapters on (a) cultivation of fruits and nuts "and more" (I was delighted that even the shrubs and "junk trees" in my hedgerows get attention - sumac, hawthorne, elderberry), (b) mushroom cultivation in a wide variety of forms, (c) forest medicinals and their practical economies, (d) the use of forest farms as nurseries, (e) the role of wood products and (f) integrating animals into the forest farm. These sections are intensely practical but satisfying in their depth and breadth. If you are wondering "is there a market for that?" you will find a chart showing results of a survey of chefs' familiarity with different mushroom varieties. If you are questioning whether ginseng would grow on your land there is a comprehensive tally of "visual site assessment and grading criteria" that will allow you to look at tree species and soil types and slopes and give your land a 'ginseng grade'. If you are thinking "could I actually make money doing that?", you will find a discussion of the economics of a duck-shiitake polyculture and another extended case study of a successful mushroom growing operation. Of course these charts and tables and case studies are not intended to be business plans to take to the bank, but they do show very convincingly that the authors have their "feet on the ground." They are clearly aware of the need to consider the balance of time, effort and expense put into an enterprise against its practical returns. These examples and the wonderful range of case studies presented throughout the book also serve as models for an economic framework for evaluating different approaches that is often neglected in books of this sort. Although they do a fine job of demonstrating how you can use rigorous economic thinking to support your design decisions,

the authors are careful to point out, and model throughout the book, that there is more to consider. There are factors beyond the economic that we all incorporate into designing our lives and vocations. As they say, "the plants and mushrooms covered in this book can and should be grown joyfully for personal satisfaction, environmental sustainability, personal use and self-sufficiency." The book concludes with an extensively-illustrated section on the multi-stage process of designing and managing a forest farm. This takes the two authors ongoing work with the McDaniels Nut Grove on the lands of Cornell University as a centerpiece. But even here the book mixes focus on details (how to safely fell a tree) with broader perspectives and concerns such as "multigenerational management" and alternative models of land ownership and acquisition. Last, but not least, the book is a visual delight! The mix of color photographs, charts and tables, line drawings, graphically-highlighted vignettes and more extended case studies keeps things lively. It is printed on quality stock that will bear up to repeated thumbing, and shows Chelsea Green's usual attention to top-notch production values. It is certainly a book that can be read through linearly, but it is also one that can be taken in pieces as your mood and interests guide you. "Farming the Woods" is a deeply-satisfying exposure to important ideas. The in-depth material is fascinating and often eye-opening, the case studies are inspiring, and the broader question of how to create a sustainable future is never far from center.

I thought this was a really detailed and nicely written book with excellent instructions and photos. I previously reviewed *Integrated Forest Gardening* and the two books together do a good job of supporting the others weak spots. I'm not going to go into as deep of a review as the two previous reviewers, but this book does a great job of detailing mushroom cultivation, forest polycultures, and alternative crops along with some economic info that isn't usually found in most books within this category. As an individual growing and managing my small forest for myself and not for profit/market, I didn't pay too much attention to that aspect; it is nice to know it's there if I change my mind. Also, like the previous reviewer mentioned, the ginseng grading checklist and other nifty tools are an added bonus with this book! Don't hesitate, buy it and you won't regret it!

Great idea, but basically a forest gardening/mushroom book- very little on animals. I also found myself scratching my head when I read quotes like "It becomes really difficult to scale up to a commercial (sugaring) operation without compromising values." It's this sort of permaculture rhetoric that leaves one wondering about the rest of the book. I have 800 trees that I tap and would never consider my operation less sustainable, or in any way a compromise of my values. Some of the

climate change data is also suspect- wish the book was more scientific and less permaculture gospel.

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