

# Exploring and Valuing Urban Non-Timber Forest Products<sup>1</sup>

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The growing interest in understanding and marketing specialty or non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in North America saves forests and rural areas while improving the income of people in communities near them. But, what about Urban NTFPs? We often overlook the urban forest when considering NTFPs. The city trees, private and public landscaping, and gardens of the urban environment comprise the urban forest. These aesthetic trees often have edible fruits or nuts, shade marketable mushrooms or provide decorative cones. In Baltimore, people are currently collecting, using and even selling Chinese chestnuts, walnuts, maple sap, ginkgo fruits, figs, and honey. The urban forest has been acknowledged and valued for its services, but not really for its goods. Minority and economically disadvantaged residents may already be benefiting from specific NTFP collection in the city. They may be using NTFPs for personal and cultural use, but there are also many other species not currently being collected as well as important micro-enterprise opportunities available. The urban environment may even offer some advantages over rural areas for NTFP collection and marketing. Current and potential urban NTFPs and their possible uses and markets need further exploration.

Community Resources, a regional urban environmental nonprofit, with funding from the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council has begun research on urban NTFPs in Baltimore, MD with reference to 5 other North American cities. We are compiling a catalog of current and potential NTFPs by interviewing community forest professionals, collectors, and marketers. We will be collecting data about prices, substitute prices, quantities collected, seasons collected, and collection methods. We will also attempt to value these urban NTFPs according to unit, tree and neighborhood. Finally, we will begin to explore NTFP issues such as land tenure, cultivation, collection permits, contributions to household sustenance, market potential, and cultural meanings to various ethnic groups. As well as broadening the understanding of the value of the urban forest to include forest goods or products, we hope to use this initial investigation of potential NTFP micro-enterprise opportunities to assist entrepreneurs in minority and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods of Baltimore.

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