


# Flotsam Farm and Ozark Wildskool's Seed to Syrup Project

Connecting Youth to Tradition, Land, and Food Sovereignty through Cooperative Sorghum  
Syrup Production

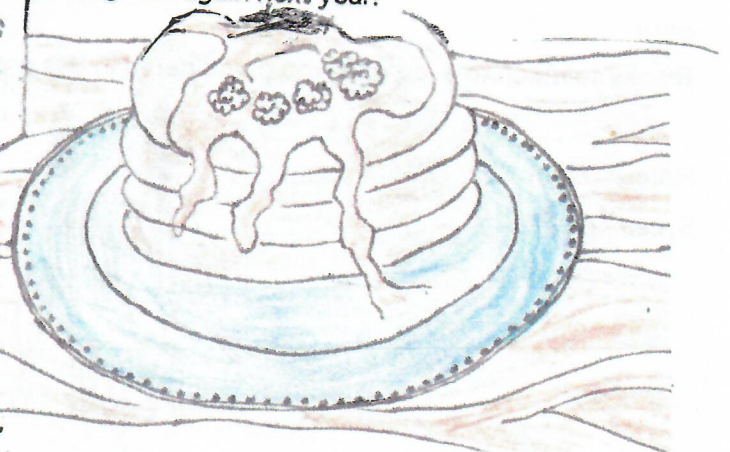
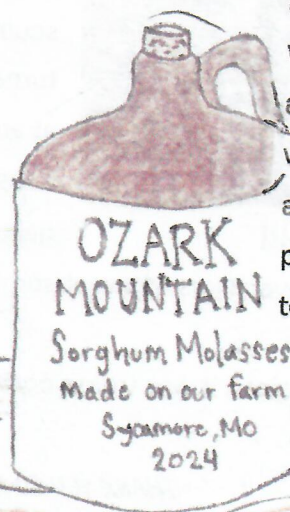


Sorghum syrup production was once a strong tradition in the Ozarks, but has largely faded. Today it is easier and cheaper to buy sugar at the store, but this does not take into account the many hidden costs of sugar production (or consumption). We wanted to use sorghum-making as a way to teach young people the importance and benefits of food sovereignty, a system in which the people who produce, distribute, and consume food also control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution. Currently, corporations and market institutions control the global food system, but we believe in local food economies, sustainable food availability, and culturally appropriate foods and practices! Producing high quality food in a socially and environmentally responsible way is not easy, and it doesn't necessarily make economic sense when worker exploitation and government subsidies make certain foods artificially cheap, but it is rewarding and fun!

When the Ozarks Neighborly Exchange group offered Flotsam Farm the use of their sorghum press, it felt like a special opportunity to continue this community tradition. With funding from a SARE (Sustainable Agriculture and Education) Youth Educator Grant, over twenty young people, ages 2 to 18, along with their parents, came together to plant, tend, harvest, and process this crop. Throughout the

Throughout the growing season we thinned, weeded, and observed the plants' progress and insect life in the patch.

We used science, art, and hands-on experience to learn about sustainable agriculture and deepen our connection with food and the land it comes from. I think we all learned a lot this year, about sorghum as well as cooperative food production. This project was a great success, and we plan to do sorghum again next year!







preparing sorghum cane to be pressed



Shadow the pony running the sorghum mill

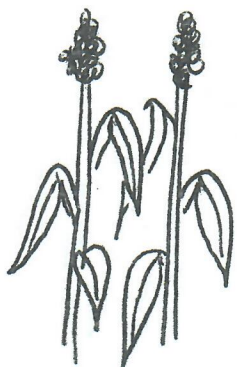
we actually ended up with about 12 gallons, including several jars of sweet sorghum foam, that will be fun to experiment with!

Thanks so much to everyone who participated in this project, it was truly a community effort!

Flotsam Farm

Sycamore, MO

<https://flotsamfarm.org/>



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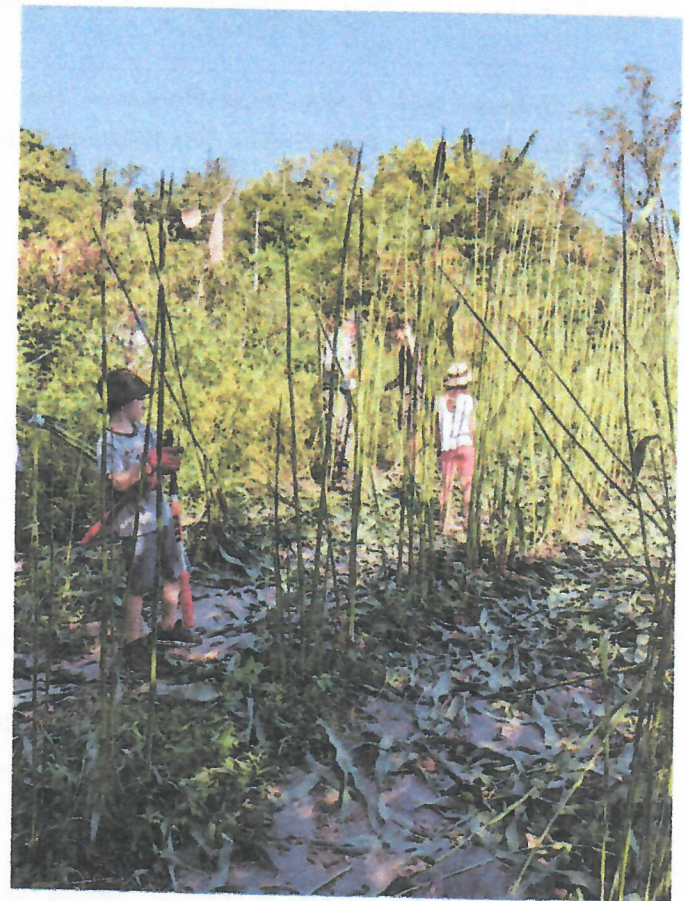
We planted approximately 1/8 of an acre of "Sugardrip" sorghum, a 100 day variety which ended up being ready about 2 weeks early! We stripped the leaves, cut seed heads and harvested the cane in mid-August, then pressed it about 10 days later. On processing day we fed the cane into the horse-powered press, large end first, where it was crushed by 3 vertical rollers. Bright green juice gushed out of the spout, through a filter, and into a barrel. The spent cane, called bagasse, emerged from the opposite side, and was fed to the horses and returned to the garden as organic matter.

When there was about 10 gallons of juice in the barrel, we scooped it out, filtered it again, and started cooking! Sorghum is often cooked in long, shallow evaporator pans set over a fire, but this year we "batch cooked" in pots using propane. The idea is to bring the juice to a boil and cook out the moisture until it reaches the perfect consistency. Our cookers kept a close eye on things, stirring often to prevent scorching, and skimming off green scum as it rose to the top. Eventually the juice turned from green to dark golden brown and at around 230 degrees, thickened to a syrupy consistency. Our predicted yield was 80 gallons of juice, giving 8 gallons of syrup, and

THANK YOU SO MUCH TO THE OZARKS WILDSKOOL AND FLOTSAM FARM FOR MAKING THIS INCREDIBLE ACT OF SELF SUFFICIENCY POSSIBLE, FUN, AND SO INSPIRING!!!

-Dez





From top left: Checking the sap for sugar content with brix meter, Stripping leaves and cutting down



## Quotes from the Sorghum Pirate Kids -

"It was really cool to work with a piece of equipment that was around this area at the same time as Rose Wilder told about it in *The Land of the Big, Red Apple!*" - Maggie, age 10

"I learned that there are many ways to use sorghum. You can make syrup, popping sorghum, sorghum molasses, animal fodder, and sweat!" - Ezra, age 7

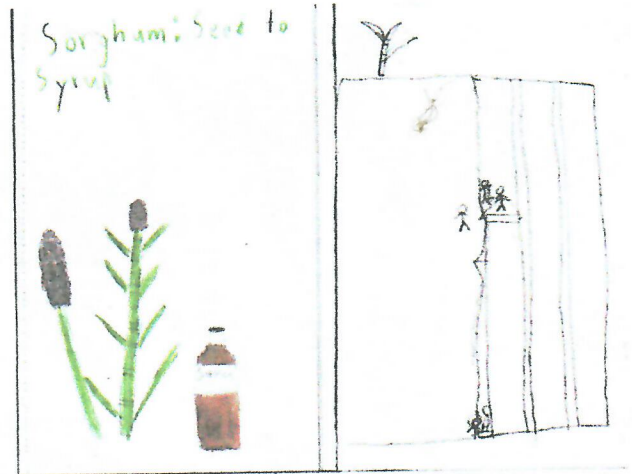
"I learned how to grow, tend, and boil sorghum, and had a joyful time working with other people on an agricultural project." - Clark, age 12

"I enjoyed working with the horse, Shadow. It was a fun adventure, with a good treasure at the end!" - Eliza, age 10

"I liked being part of cutting the sorghum and checking the sugar content with the brix meter was really cool." - Kalani, age 10

"It was fun checking for aphids on the leaves and my favorite part was eating the sorghum syrup!" - Inanna, age 7

"Working with the press was so cool!!" - Patrick, age 13



Clark, age 12

