



PrairieErth Farm



*Handbook
for visitors*

Food Forest Project

**Developing Vertically Integrated Edible Biosystems
in a USDA Hardiness Zone 5 Environment**

This project seeks to enhance the food producing capacity of marginal or underutilized land, and to increase the utility of land currently in production or in use as a conservation practice by (1) using vertical as well as horizontal space, (2) developing plant guilds that provide natural fertility and pest protection, (3) reducing or eliminating synthetic inputs, and (4) producing a wide variety of food products marketable in a local foods environment.

Our goal is to create a biosystem composed of mutually beneficial plant guilds or associations that act symbiotically to provide pest and disease protection and meet the fertility needs of the community. Plants are selected for their value as human and wildlife/pollinator food and their ability to enhance and protect other plants used for food (systems plants). The market value of each crop is considered, as is the “per acre” production value of the system.

There are numerous “applications”, or situations where the food forest concept can be used to enhance new or existing food producing areas. For example, a new or existing orchard (usually a monoculture) can add value by developing understory layers of marketable crops such as berries, vegetables, herbs, or flowers. A conservation practice, such as a windbreak or field border, can also become an income producing area without diminishing its conservation value and effectiveness; and its value to pollinators can be increased significantly.

Homeowners can incorporate the concept into their landscaping, use them as visual screens along property lines, or simply enjoy the wide variety of foods they produce.

At PrairieErth Farm we see this system as another way we can increase the diversity of our farm operation, reduce our dependence on non-renewables, provide a greater variety of products for our local markets, and make our farm a healthier, more resilient, and more interesting place to live and work.

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