Specialty Crops For Small Growers

15 Best Profitable Plants For Backyards & Small Acreage
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Introduction

Growing plants for profit is a great way to turn your gardening skills into serious cash. While most of us immediately think of tomatoes or salad greens, the most profitable plants are specialty crops that are not always found in a home vegetable garden. Many specialty crops can bring as much as $90,000 per acre, and are quite easy to grow. Best of all, most specialty crops can be grown without a full-time commitment. If you have a few extra hours a week, then you can be a specialty crop grower.

If you can spare some space in your backyard, and would like to make an extra income, consider growing profitable plants. In an area as small as 20' x 20', you can make a nice profit growing specialty crops. It's important to match the plants you grow to the space you have available. For example, folks with a limited space should choose smaller plants, like ground covers or succulents, while those with a larger yard or acreage could grow a wider range of crops, including the larger landscaping shrubs and trees.

Even growers with no yard can find a specialty crop to grow. Oyster mushrooms, for example, can be produced in a basement, garage or shed, as they don't require soil. Many African violet growers propagate and grow hundreds of plants in their basement or a spare room.

By the time you've reviewed all 14 specialty crops, you'll have a better idea about which crops could be best for you. You can also visit the web sites, www.profitableplants.com and www.profitableplantsdigest.com, where you'll find over 100 articles about growing for profit, and more information about our grower guides for specialty crops.
Growing Bamboo For Profit

Landscapers and homeowners are paying as much as $150 each for potted bamboo plants, and many growers are finding it hard to keep up with the demand. Why is bamboo so popular? It's a versatile plant in the landscape, as it can be used for hedges, screens or as stand-alone "specimen" plants. Bamboo is not just a tropical plant, as many cold-hardy varieties can handle sub-zero winters. Using pots in a bamboo business, it's possible to grow thousands of dollars worth of profitable plants in a backyard nursery.

It's important to know that growing bamboo is not a get-rich-quick scheme. You certainly won't get rich overnight. So let's do the math. Container-grown bamboo, on average, sells for $30 each. In a quarter acre, you can fit 2400 plants. Selling 2400 plants priced at $30 each will get you $72,000.

When you're ready to begin, the first thing you need to consider is your climate and environment. If winter temperatures frequently drop below zero F. then you should consider growing something other than bamboo. If winter temperatures consistently stay above zero F. you should be able to grow healthy bamboo plants.

Now you need to think about your soil. Is it healthy enough to grow bamboo plants? Most bamboo plants will prefer soil with a neutral pH of around 7. Also, be sure you have plenty of room for your plants. Remember, a quarter acre can make you about $60,000 a year.
Your start-up costs will mainly be the cost of the plant starts. Try buying 20 different popular varieties to start out. How can you find out what’s popular? Visit your local garden center and find out what their top sellers are, what they keep a high number of in stock. Talk to landscapers and commercial growers, and see what they’re typically buying and using. Our growing guide, *Growing Bamboo For Profit*, lists thirty of the most popular bamboo varieties, and wholesale sources as well.

Once you’ve found the varieties you’d like to grow, you’re ready to purchase your starting stock. Many nurseries don’t carry a huge selection, so you should buy from wholesale growers. After you’ve planted your starting stock, be patient. Add organic slow-release fertilizer as necessary. During the spring of the second year, you should now be able to divide your plants to triple or quadruple your stock of bamboo plants.

Dividing your plants is how you really get your money’s worth from your plants. When you notice that new clumps are emerging from the ground, divide and re-plant. Remember to keep the rhizomes moist before and after planting.

For the bamboo plants you plan to sell, consider propagating them in containers. Container-grown plants can be sold almost any time of the year. Remember to use containers (such as pots and planters) that can “breathe,” as this will help provide for sufficient water drainage.

One creative grower was able to start his bamboo business for hardly a cent. He offered to do free pruning of bamboo, and then saved and repotted the rhizomes to resell the next year. He now is growing over 50 varieties and makes $80,000 a year.
Here are 5 proven ways to market bamboo:

1. **Direct Retail Sales**: If your town allows it, you should consider selling bamboo for landscaping directly to the public. This lets you get to know customers in your area, and build customer loyalty. Plus, unlike wholesale, you get paid right away. Be sure to put out a sign-up sheet so your customers can stay in the know about upcoming sales, new plant varieties and whatever else might be going on with your bamboo nursery.

2. **Bamboo Products**: Here’s your chance to get creative. Instead of simply selling bamboo, sell bamboo products. During the winter time, the plants will become dormant. Then, bamboo poles can be harvested, and then turned into a variety of products, such as privacy screens, garden art, water pipes, fencing, vases and parrot stands. You could also consider putting on a workshop to share your knowledge of bamboo plants with other people. Teach people how to landscape with bamboo, and other decorative uses.

3. **Landscapers**: You can make great profits selling directly to landscapers. Landscapers and commercial gardeners often buy their plants in large quantities, and when they find a business they like, they’ll continue to buy more and more plants. Find out what they’re looking for, and if you can grow healthy plants at a reasonable price, then you could see a lot of business. Put together a flyer listing what you have to offer, and start passing it out.

4. **Garden Centers**: Like landscapers and commercial gardeners, garden centers have to get their plants from somewhere, so why not you? Visit your local garden center and see what bamboo plants they’re stocking and selling. What are their prices? Talk to them and find out what they’re looking for. Again, if you can offer just what they need at reasonable prices, then you could see a lot of repeat business. Here’s a tip - try to sell to them in the off-season when the buyers will have more time to listen to you.
5. **Growing U-Cut Bamboo:** Borrowing a successful sales method from U-cut Christmas tree growers, an enterprising bamboo grower has developed a unique part-time business that brings yearly profits of over $40,000 working just one day a week. He sells U-cut bamboo by the foot on his one-acre bamboo patch.

He planted several varieties to give customers a choice of colors and sizes, ranging from pencil-thin stalks to huge 6 inch diameter timber bamboo poles.

Because he's a self-described "geezer," his goal is to reduce his work to collecting the money and chatting with customers about bamboo. A large photo album full of pictures of bamboo projects completed by customers is his only sales aid, and a tiny classified ad in the local paper for three summer months brings all the customers he can handle. Customers cut and load their own bamboo, and the poles are priced reasonably to encourage do-it-yourselfers.

The bamboo grows 20 to 50 feet in just one year, and so the bamboo patch is almost totally self-renewing, with just one application of fertilizer per year. Customers use the poles for fencing, furniture, duck blinds, crafts, flutes, wind chimes, water pipes, concrete reinforcing and garden art projects.

This could be a perfect business for anyone with a spare acre or two that is near a population center of at least 25,000 people. To keep your hours to a minimum, open to the public on Saturdays only.

Bamboo is not just a tropical plant, as many types are cold hardy to winter temperatures between -10 degrees and +15 degrees. The panda bamboo, which originated in the Himalayas, is cold hardy to -25 degrees.

Local bamboo growers have a big advantage over low-cost producers in Asia, as shipping costs can inflate prices dramatically. Selling direct to the consumer with a U-cut operation allows retail customers to still enjoy low prices by harvesting their own poles.
One Oregon bamboo grower has focused on an even smaller niche for this profitable plant, specializing in producing six varieties of bamboo that are just the right size for fencing, with poles from 2 inches to 3 inches in diameter. He produces "value-added" fencing panels 6 feet high (the maximum height allowed by most building codes) and 8 feet wide, drilling and threading the poles together with copper wire. His two acre bamboo farm is sold out every year, with about half the customers buying just poles to make their own fences and the other half buying ready-to-go fence panels.

To learn more about growing bamboo for profit, visit www.profitableplantsdigest.com, where you’ll find dozens of articles about this remarkable plant, as well as information about our growing guide, *Growing Bamboo For Profit*. 
Growing Flowers For Profit

Flower production is one of the fastest growing crop trends in agriculture today, with strong demand for all types of flowers especially unique or hard-to-grow varieties. Flowers are a perfect backyard cash crop, as they produce quickly, are easy to grow and provide an income all summer long. Startup costs are low – just seeds and labor – so as little as $100 can put you in business.

Some growers use a "cut your own" sales approach, so customers can choose their own mix, while others prefer to sell at the Saturday market to take advantage of higher prices. One Virginia grower gets up to $5 per stem for her sunflowers, and grows mostly the proven money makers, like snapdragons, larkspur, peonies, sunflowers and zinnias.

Another growing approach is to focus on providing starter plants to retailers or direct to consumers. The strongest demand is for a “instant color” flowers grown in four-inch pots ready to transplant to the garden as finished blooming plants. This includes annuals, such as the marigolds, Petunias, Salvia and zinnias. Begonias and impatiens, though more costly to raise, almost always sell out first. Popular perennials include Columbine, bleeding heart, delphiniums and bearded iris.

If you live in a rural area, focus on growing flowers for resale to garden centers and other retailers in nearby larger towns. Concentrate on plants the big growers have overlooked because they take more care but for which there is
always a market. The three floral “niches” that fit this description nicely are African violets, heritage roses and wildflowers native to your area.

African violets are always in demand, easy to propagate from cuttings and grow and sell the best in the winter when the blooms can bring a spot of color indoors. They come in an almost endless variety of colors and range from thimble size plants to giants. There are trailing violets that spread and the “cousins” - plants in the Gesneriad family such as Streptocarpus and Chirita.

Many small growers use a basement or spare room to grow African violets, as they don't require a lot of space. In fact, a square foot of growing space can produce nine 4-inch potted plants four times a year. That's over 1400 plants in a modest 4' x 10' area, which, at a retail price of $6, is $8400 worth of African violets!

Another “niche” flower that has been popular for many years is “heritage” or “heirloom” roses. Why the renewed interest in these old beauties? There are several reasons. One is the exquisite fragrance of the old roses. Another is their hardiness. The old heritage roses tend to be much more disease resistant than the modern hybrids. The appeal of heritage roses is timeless, and the amount of care they require is much less than the hybrids.

The wildflower business is booming, as homeowners turn to “natural landscaping” and interest grows in reviving the landscaping trends of the last century, which emphasized native plants. In addition federal legislation and the laws of many states now require that a certain percentage of highway landscaping funds be used to plant wildflowers. Projects like these have opened up new markets for producers of wildflower seeds, and stimulated demand for wildflower plants around homes.

You'll find detailed growing information about growing and marketing flowers in our guidebook, **Growing Flowers For Profit**, available at: [www.profitableplants.com](http://www.profitableplants.com).
Small growers can grow these profitable plants for seed harvest, cut flowers and bouquets and for value-added products such as wildflower seed gift cards or wildflower seed paper. To get an idea of the many possibilities visit www.Bloomin.com.

Yet another profitable niche market for growers is to specialize in dried flowers. Dried flowers (also known as everlastings) are a great way to complement cut flowers. Plus, they’re fairly easy to grow. Once they’re dry, you don’t need to rush to sell them, like you would fresh cut flowers. With care, they can keep in good condition until you’re able to sell them. That’s one of their biggest appeals to growers.

So when it comes to dried flowers, how can you get ahead? First, be sure to pick the right kinds. Here are some that are especially popular:

- **Artemisia**: This is heavily used as a filler material that can provide a nice backdrop for other flowers.
- **Baby’s Breath**: This is also widely used as a filler material in arrangements of flowers.
- **Delphinium Larkspur**: These have a wide range of colors from blue to purple to pure white.
- **Lavender**: Thanks to its vivid smell, these can make for an ideal addition to any bouquet or wreath. Plus these need very little attention.

One great thing about these four everlastings is that they can be air dried, which makes it very easy for the grower. There are many other everlastings that can be air dried as well, including: Strawflower, Statice, Money Planet and Love-In-A-Mist.
What Are The Best Perennials To Grow?

Achillea, Allium, Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum, Lavandula and Veronica Longifolia are some of the most highly-recommended perennials.

What Are The Best Annuals To Grow?

Some of the best annuals to grow include Antirrhinum, Celosia, Consolida Ambigua, Helianthus Annuus, Godetia and Salvia.

You’ll find detailed information about growing and marketing flowers in our guidebook, *Growing Flowers For Profit*, at [www.profitableplants.com](http://www.profitableplants.com).
Growing Heirloom Tomatoes For Profit

Turn $50 Into $6,000 With “Ugly” Tomatoes!

Growing heirloom tomatoes is one of the best ways to grow profits in your garden. Tomatoes have always been the most popular vegetable in the grocery store produce department, and at farmers markets. Heirloom tomatoes are even more popular, and bring higher prices because they taste so good.

Heirloom tomatoes are easy to spot, as they look old-fashioned, not quite perfect and some varieties are just plain ugly! Most heirloom tomatoes have unusual shapes or colors, with wrinkles and blemishes not often seen in the produce aisle. But once you’ve tested the rich, wonderful flavors, you’ll be hooked.

For market growers, heirloom tomatoes can bring big profits – as much as $100 per plant – and repeat sales from customers who are eager to buy heirloom tomatoes for the taste they simply can’t find in a supermarket tomato. Growers are reporting increasing sales every year, as more and more consumers discover the taste and flavor of heirlooms. Because of this growing demand, growers are able to charge premium prices for most heirloom varieties. In fact, a recent survey of market growers found that the average price for heirloom tomatoes was double the price of conventional tomatoes! Some of the more exotic varieties – those with unusual colors, shapes or flavors – sell for up to three times the price of ordinary tomatoes.

Because heirloom tomatoes bring high prices, they can be one of the best income producers for small growers. Allowing the usual 6 square feet per plant, with an average yield of 25 pounds per plant and a price of $4 per pound, that's over $16 per square foot of garden! Many growers find a simple “hoop house” – the affordable greenhouse – can boost yields even further, plus extending the growing season and reducing pest and disease problems.
If you’re on a tight budget, growing heirloom tomatoes could be an ideal crop, as start-up costs are low and profits start in about 3 months when the tomatoes are harvested. Spend $50 on seeds and you could harvest as much as $6,000 worth of tomatoes in short order from even a small garden. There are heirloom varieties for every climate, from Florida to Minnesota, so you can grow the best and most productive heirloom tomatoes for your area.

Karen Robinson started with just 20 heirloom tomato plants in a sunny corner of her backyard garden. That first year’s harvest – over 400 pounds of Brandywines, Green Zebras, German Johnsons and Costoluto Genovese – sold out fast, with more customers than tomatoes. She used her profits to build a small hoop house to extend her growing season, and tripled production, to over 1,400 pounds the second year. Many are sold at the farmers market, but she finds her email list of loyal customer’s accounts for almost half of her sales. This year’s challenge is whether to add another hoop house to accommodate the growing demand and be able to try more heirloom varieties.

Because heirloom tomatoes do not ship well, they must be sold close to where they are grown, which fits right in with the booming “buy local, eat local” movement. This creates a huge opportunity for small local growers who can produce and sell within their own community.

Today, consumers are choosing to spend more on high-quality, local produce that is healthy, flavorful and naturally grown. They like to know who grew their food rather than buying produce shipped in from far away that could contain unknown pesticides or herbicides. Using the information in our new book, Profitable Heirloom Tomatoes, you will discover how to get your share of those “educated dollars” and earn a better living on less land producing healthy food you can be proud to sell! To learn more about growing heirloom tomatoes, visit www.profitableplantsdigest.com.
Nicknamed "green gold", the value of this plant is in its slow growing roots. Asians have valued ginseng for thousands of years as a healing herb and tonic. Even though growing ginseng requires a six year wait to harvest the mature roots, most growers also sell young "rootlets" and seeds for income while waiting for the roots to mature. Over the six year period, growers can make as much as $100,000 on a half-acre plot from seeds, rootlets and mature roots. That's why ginseng has been prized as a specialty crop since George Washington's day, when ginseng profits helped finance the Revolutionary war against the British. Ginseng production is only possible in areas with cold winters.

3 Ways To Profit From Ginseng

Ginseng is one of the most popular herbs in the world. It has dozens of medicinal uses, and is taken daily by millions around the world. So what are some ways you can profit with a ginseng-growing business? Here are three to get you started:

1. Mature Roots

Patient growers will love the profits you can make from mature roots. After the sixth year you should have some roots ready to sell. In a half-acre of land, you should able to produce about five hundred pounds of roots. So how much are those selling for? Currently, those are routinely selling for $300 to $600 a pound. What makes the price vary so much? The answer is the quality of the roots. That's why it's in your best interest to plant quality seeds or rootlets and take great care of your ginseng as it grows. So let's do the math. Let's say you're able
to sell your roots for $300 a pound. If you have five hundred pounds of roots to sell, you could make $90,000, all just from your mature roots.

2. **Seeds**

After the third year, your ginseng garden should be producing seed that you can start selling. By that third year, in a half-acre garden you’ll only have about twenty pounds of seed. After the fourth year that number will jump to around fifty pounds of seed. After the fifth and sixth years you can expect around one hundred pounds of seed. So how much can you make from that? Currently, seed is selling for about $150 a pound. If you have one hundred pounds of seed to sell, that could mean about $15,000 coming your way.

3. **Rootlets**

Ginseng growers start their own ginseng gardens with either seeds or rootlets. For growers, rootlets allow them to speed up the process by two years. Rootlets can help ginseng grow a little quicker. If you’re looking to make a little extra income, consider growing rootlets for resale. This is a good way to make money while you’re waiting for your roots to mature.

**Questions About Growing Ginseng for Profit**

**Do I Have The Right Climate To Grow Ginseng?**

Ginseng can do well in most climates. You need to grow in an area that is exposed to some sub-freezing weather. Cold will help break your ginseng’s dormancy, and will lead to it sprouting in the spring.

**Which Growing Method Should I Use?**

The artificial shade method can be a good one, but it costs several thousand dollars an acre to get started. If you have a few acres of hardwood trees, then the
wild-simulated method can work great for you. Chances are the woods-cultivated method will be the one you’ll use. You simply use the natural shade of a forest canopy of hardwood trees, such as maple, oak and sycamore.

**How Can I Tell When My Dried Roots Are Dry?**

Properly dried roots should make a crisp “snap!” sound when broken. You can dry your roots naturally by placing them in a covered area, spread out on a screened rack. If there isn’t good air circulation, use a fan and keep it running for two to four weeks. At that time your roots should be dried.

**How Can I Sell Ginseng Roots?**

There are three main ways to sell ginseng roots. First is to sell directly to wholesale buyers. This gets you paid right away, and you can sell right out of your backyard nursery. Second is to sell to out-of-state buyers. Take good care in shipping your ginseng. Treat it like a fragile item. Finally, you can sell to ginseng brokers, who buy ginseng in bulk and then resell it to other people.

**How Much Does It Cost To Start A Ginseng Business?**

You can start your own ginseng business for a fairly low amount. Using the woods-cultivated or wild-simulated methods, you should be able to start a quarter-acre ginseng garden for less than $1,000. Over a six year growing cycle, that quarter-acre could produce as much as $50,000 worth of roots, seeds and rootlets.

**Using The Woods-Cultivated Method, How Do I Start My Growing Beds?**

First clear away any underbrush in the area. Next use a walk-behind tiller to work the soil over several times until it is loose to at least a depth of six inches. If you’re planting seeds, plant them one-half to one inch deep and three inches apart. Be sure to keep the rows about eight inches apart.
When Will My Mature Roots Be Ready To Sell?
In most cases, your mature roots will be ready to sell after five or six years.

Can I Sell Anything From My Ginseng Garden In The Meantime?
Seeds and rootlets can be ready for sale as soon as 2 years after you started your ginseng garden.

To learn more about growing ginseng for profit, read *Growing Ginseng For Profit*, available at our web site, www.profitableplantsdigest.com.
Due to high labor costs and water shortages, ground covers are becoming the sensible, low-maintenance way to landscape. Growers like ground covers too, as they are easy to propagate, grow and sell. Bringing profits of up to $20 per square foot, ground covers are an ideal cash crop for the smaller backyard plant nursery.

Ground covers are just that, basically any plant that covers the ground. The start-up costs are reasonable, and you stand to make one of the highest per-square-foot incomes for a backyard nursery. So what do ground covers do? They help control the threat of erosion and weeds, and they reduce the amount of water needed to keep the land healthy.

There are currently hundreds of plants that can be used as ground covers. Don’t worry, you don’t have to grow all of them to succeed as a plant grower. Instead, focus on a few. The “Big Four” include: English Ivy, Pachysandra, Vinca and Winter Creeper. If you’re starting out and are unsure just what to grow, consider visiting your local retail nursery and see what they’re stocking. Ask around. What are people looking for? What grows well in your area? Are there any specialty ground covers that seem like the perfect fit for you? It might take some experimentation, but you’ll find what works best soon enough.
Here are some highly-recommended and profitable ground covers that you might want to try:

- **Astilbe**: A perennial that provides delicate flowers in the spring.

- **Erica (Heath)**: A low-growing ground cover that requires hardly any maintenance.

- **Hedera (Ivy)**: A hardy Evergreen ground cover that spreads rapidly. “Thorndale” and “Baltic are two of the most popular English Ivy varieties.

- **Iberis (Candytuft)**: A very popular ground cover for rock gardeners.

- **Chamaemelum Nobile (Chamomile)**: An evergreen ground cover that is widely used in Europe. The flowers make for a soothing tea.

- **Thymus Serpyllum**: This can make a fragrant carpet that smell great when you walk on it. There are dozens of low-growing varieties, such as lemon thyme and woolly thyme.

After your plants are ready to be sold, now what? Let’s get selling! After all, having a backyard nursery is all about growing for profit, isn’t it? The most profitable way is to sell directly to the public. Retail sales get you paid now, instead of waiting months, which can be the case with wholesaling. You can also have a “wholesale day,” where you sell your ground covers at a discounted price. Having a big sale could bring some big crowds. Make sure you have plant labels and that all your plants are labeled with the correct type and price. You need to be ready for those big crowds, so make things easier on yourself by having all your plants labeled and grouped.

Looking for another profitable way to sell your specialty crops? Try mail-order sales. Since ground covers are a niche market, many people are looking for a wider selection than what is available at their local garden center. That’s why they turn to mail-order to find what they want. Put together a web site, flyer or
free catalog, and try to get it in as many potential customers’ hands as possible. Soon you could be sending your ground covers through the mail and getting big profits in return.

You can be making money with ground covers in no time. Grow what people want, and then be sure to let everyone know what you have for sale. So get growing! To learn more, read *How to Start a Profitable Backyard Plant Nursery*, available at our web site, [www.profitableplants.com](http://www.profitableplants.com).
Growing Herbs For Profit

Growing the most popular culinary and medicinal herbs is a great way to start a profitable herb business. The most popular culinary herbs include basil, chives, cilantro and oregano. Medicinal herbs have been widely used for thousands of years, and their popularity continues to grow as people seek natural remedies for their health concerns.

Starting an herb growing business is really quite easy, not to mention fun and best of all, profitable. In fact you can be on your way to success in the herbal business in six easy steps. Follow these and you’ll see more and more customers coming your way.

1. Gather Materials

First of all, you’re going to need raised beds to grow your plants. It is recommended that they be 3-4 feet wide. The length is up to you. Herbs need lots of sun light, so don’t put them in a shady place, such as near a tree. A wheelbarrow and hand tools are a necessity for mixing your soil blend.

A 40 inch by 30 feet bed with six-inch pots (in general, use large pots, such as a six-inch pot, over smaller ones), makes it possible for about 400 plants.

2. Decide Which Herbs To Grow

Now that you have all your basic supplies, it’s time to decide which herbs to grow. In general it’s a good idea to focus on a select few rather than offering a huge
selection. Are you more interested in growing culinary herbs or medicinal herbs? Or what about herbs for herbal tea? Once you decide which herbs you’d like to grow, you can buy herb seeds. There are several online companies that specialize in seeds for commercial herb growers, such as Johnny’s Seeds and Richter’s.

3. **Plant Your Herb Plants**

Your seeds came in the mail. Now the fun begins! Plant your seeds. Consider using plug trays as a way to start growing plants indoor, and then you can rotate them out into the outdoor growing area.

4. **Take Care Of Your Plants**

Only use organic fertilizers, as they help plants grow healthier and at a less-stressed rate. It’s also a good idea to apply liquid seaweed or liquid fish emulsion as foliar spray every week during growing season. This can provide the right amount of nutrients needed to keep your plants healthy. Also, water your plants only when they need it. Try once a day, preferably in the morning.

5. **Start Selling Them**

When your herbs are grown, you’re ready to start selling them. Based on your local laws, maybe you can sell them right out of your own garden. Or perhaps you can set up a roadside stand. A charity fundraiser can be a great place to sell potted herbs and people are often willing to pay more for them if they know some of the profits are going to a good cause. One grower in our area sells her herbs at 6 charity fundraisers every summer, and grossed over $32,000 at those six. She donates 25% to the charity. Win-win!

The farmer’s market is another great place to get customers. The larger 6” potted herbs seem to do better at farmer’s markets than the smaller 3 & 4 inch sizes, as folks are in a spending mood, and like buying a plant that’s almost ready to harvest.
6. **Advertise And Get Creative**

You want to get customers and then keep them coming back. Make flyers and put them up at bulletin boards around town. Print business cards and put something fun on it, like a pesto recipe on the back! Get creative. Putting something on a business card that makes your customer want to keep the card will keep the business coming back to you.

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**Culinary Herbs To Grow**

Growing herbs can be highly profitable and fun. It’s really quite easy too. You’d be surprised how many culinary herbs there are available and how many of them are huge sellers. Some practically sell themselves. Here are five of the most popular and profitable.

1. **Basil:** Tops the list as the most popular culinary herb. Basil is a very tender plant and should be kept indoors until there is no danger of frost. Growing basil starts in plug trays can work great for basil. Expect to be selling lots of these, so keep the fresh plants coming.

2. **Chives:** Standard chives are a steady seller. These will start to germinate after a week or so. And unlike basil, these can actually do quite well in cooler weather.
3. **Cilantro**: Is another popular culinary herb. In addition to its cooking values, it also has many other ones. It is particularly good for digestion and other medicinal values. Expect to sell lots of this at the Saturday farmer's market.

4. **Oregano**: Is one of the most popular herbs that you’ll find in Italian cooking. Unforgettable taste and aroma give this herb its main appeal. Oregano is a commonly used garnish for stews, soups, and gravies.

5. **Parsley**: Is so popular it even has historical significance. The ancient Greeks used it at the athletic games, weaving it into victory crowns. They also fed it to their horses to make them run faster.

### Medicinal Herbs To Grow

Medicinal herbs are steadily gaining popularity. As people adopt a more natural and healthy lifestyle, medicinal herbs are used more and more, and the demand for them is growing. Here are seven of the more popular medicinal herbs that could be a profitable addition to an herb growing business.

1. **Calendula**: Popularity dates back to King Henry VII of England who loved colored food. Calendula was used to season his meals. It also has many other benefits. In particular it is good for digestive health as well as for skin preparations. It can be made into a foot soak or bath herb. To get the most medicinal potency out of it, grow a variety with high resin content, such as “Resina” found at Johnny’s Seeds, a popular online source for medicinal herbs. Calendula is one of the easiest medicinal herbs to grow.

2. **Lavender**: Has so many uses it’s been called the “Swiss army knife” of herbs. In addition to the powerful fragrance (the essential oil in lavender is one of the top-ten most used in the fragrance industry), it has many medicinal values as well. These include women and children’s health, skin care, nervous system conditions, and pain relief.
3. **Marsh Mallow**: This versatile herb is useful for coughs or bronchitis. It can also help the digestive tract and various skin conditions. Turn it into a marshmallow tea and you have something tasty and healthy for cold and flu season.

4. **Catnip**: You’ve probably heard of this one. It’s primarily used as a stimulant on cats, but it can also be a soothing sedative for humans. It can also bring about pain and stress relief as well as helping with cold and flu symptoms. Something you might want to consider is making “cat-er-pillows.” It’s just like it sounds: a pillow filled with catnip. These popular items are very easy to put together. It’s simply a mini-pillow made from fabric scraps. You throw in dried catnip, sew it shut, and you’re done. These can be sold at street fairs, stores, church fundraisers, and more, and are proven sellers.

5. **Lemon Verbena**: Makes a delicious tea. It is used for digestive benefits as well as a calming and sleep aid. To get the most benefit, harvest the leaves right before you use them.

6. **St John’s Wort**: You’ve probably heard of this one and might even know someone who swears by it. In addition to its popular usage as a mood-altering herb, it can serve as skin treatment, provide immune support, and provide prevention during cold and flu season. Be sure to wait until it’s fully matured before harvest so you can get the maximum benefits of this popular herb.

7. **Chamomile**: Mmm, chamomile can make for a soothing tea. Like many other medicinal herbs, it has great digestive benefits. It can also be a calming and sleep aid. You’ll want to grow the German variety as this will produce harvestable flowers in just over two months. The best time to grow them is early in the season as it tends to bolt in the hot summer.

Grow and sell these favorites and you’ll be on your way to growing profits in the herbs business. To learn more about the business of herb growing read *Growing Herbs for Profit*, available at our web site, [www.profitableplants.com](http://www.profitableplants.com).
Growing Landscaping Trees And Shrubs For Profit

With individual plants bringing as much as $100 in a 5-gallon pot, many small backyard plant nurseries are enjoying success on a small scale. Those that specialize in unique or hard-to-find tree and shrub varieties can charge premium prices and still sell out each year. The secret to success is finding a "niche" that you enjoy, and then growing the varieties that simply cannot be found at your average plant nursery.

One good example of a profitable niche is growing native plants. For several decades, landscapers and homeowners have been switching from more exotic plants and acres of lawn to native grasses, wildflowers, trees and shrubs native to their region. This is a part of the "sustainable landscaping" movement you may have heard about.

As the popularity of native plants continues to grow, there will be more and more demand for native trees and shrubs in all areas. Potential customers include landscapers, who tend to be keenly aware of new trends and enjoy educating their customers about them and individual homeowners and property owners, who want to plant low-maintenance native plants. In addition, native trees and shrubs are often required for many conservation and reclamation projects.

Another profitable market is native fruit and nut trees for orchardists who want to grow the traditional plants, such as shellbark hickory, chinquapin or chokeberry. To get a better idea of what's possible, visit www.gonativetrees.com.
A local grower in my area specializes in large "specimen" trees and shrubs, costing up to $1,000 each. Buyers are homeowners and landscapers who need an "instant" tree large enough to look like it's been there for years, replacement trees for those damaged by disease, vandals or car accidents, even new construction projects where money is no object, but size is.

Common Questions

Looking for some answers? This list of the most common questions asked by those who want to start their own backyard nursery will guide you through the steps to starting up and succeeding.

Is It Expensive To Start A Backyard Tree And Shrub Nursery?

It will require some money, but you should be able to get all your supplies for under a few hundred dollars. You don’t have to have thousands of dollars to be able to be a success. Remember, start small with your business and grow naturally.

Does It Require A Full-Time Commitment?

No. You can work as little or as much as you like. Plants do need some attention, but you can still have a day job or other commitments.

How Much Space Do I Need For My Nursery?

There’s not a specific number, but you need enough space to make your nursery profitable. Think about the size of the plants you want to grow. If you want to grow plants in one-gallon containers, you can fit 3,000 in a nursery measuring 1,000 square feet. In that same space, you can fit 400 fifteen-gallon containers. Remember, bigger container sizes can bring bigger money too, but take longer to grow. Just do some research and find out what will work best for you.
Do I Need Any Licenses Or Permits?
Yes, you will need a business license. In addition, some towns require a special permit to have a backyard nursery. Check with them and find out. Also, if your state requires sales tax, you’ll need a resale license.

What Plants Should I Grow?
Visit a gardening center and see just what they’re selling. Pay attentions to the items that they stock in large quantities. Also, ask landscapers and other people just what they’re looking for. What are they buying? Do a web search to research the trees and shrubs you’re interested in, and learn what others are growing.

What Type Of Fertilizers Should I Use?
Use time-release fertilizers (also known as slow-release fertilizers) as these give out nutrients over a long period of time, which greatly eases the amount of work on you. Plus, they’re safe for your plants and soil.

What’s A Good Soil Mix?
You can buy pre-mixed soil or make your own. If you make your own, try following this formula:

- Six parts topsoil or compost
- Three parts peat
- Two parts sand
How Can My Business Be Successful In The Long-Term?

Grow slowly and naturally. Don’t take on too much at first. Also, keep with it. Just keep trying to get better. As with any business, your plant-growing business will benefit from a plan for the future. Where do you want your business to go, and how can you get there? Learn from mistakes and try to get better. You’ll get there soon enough!

To learn more, read *How to Start a Profitable Backyard Plant Nursery*, available at our web site: [www.profitableplants.com](http://www.profitableplants.com). Our detailed book about growing unique, high-value trees for profit can be found at [www.profitableplantsdigest.com](http://www.profitableplantsdigest.com).
For those without space to garden, growing mushrooms for profit can produce a great return in a small space. Exotic mushrooms, such as oyster and shiitake, make sense, as they can be grown indoors without soil. Oyster mushrooms, for example, produce around 25 pounds per square foot of growing space in a year's time. At the current price of $12 a pound, that's $30,000 worth of mushrooms from a 10'x10' space! Exotic mushrooms do not travel well, so small local growers will always have an edge over distant producers. At our local Saturday market, the oyster mushrooms are also the first items to sell out.

The Six Steps

1. **Get Your Spawn And Substrate**: You’ll need a spawn to start the culture. You can produce your own spawn using a sterile culture, or you can buy ready-to-inoculate spawn, which are carried by suppliers. You’ll also need to buy the substrate, which is usually straw or sawdust.

2. **Prepare The Substrate**: By heating it to sterilize it and then spread out to cool before using.

3. **Pack The Plastic Bags**: Now it's time to pack plastic bags with the straw and spawn. Pack two or three inches of straw into the plastic bag and then lightly sprinkle the spawn on top. Repeat this until you've filled the bag.
4. **Incubation**: Now it’s time for incubation. Keep the growing area dark and around 78 degrees F. Place the bags on a shelving unit. When you start to notice tiny pinhead mushrooms near the air holes in your bag, then you’re ready to move on to the next step.

5. **Fruiting**: For your fruiting room, you need a high level of humidity. The temperature will need to be 65 to 70 degrees F. Unlike the incubation room, you’ll actually need a lot of natural light – at least 12 hours a day.

6. **Harvest**: Just before your mushroom caps are fully uncurled, that’s when it’s time to harvest. To do so, twist the stem off as near to the growing block as you are able to. You’ve now harvested your mushrooms.

After your oyster mushrooms are grown, they’re ready to be sold. Mushrooms generally do best when they’re sold fresh. If you can’t sell your entire supply soon, freeze or dry the remaining mushrooms and you can sell them sometime in the future. For the crop you’re ready to sell now, you have several ways to do it:

1. **Restaurants**: Many restaurants love to use fresh mushrooms. Talk to local restaurants and see if they are interested in what you’re growing. Next, give them some free samples. If the chefs like the taste of your mushrooms, then you could see a lot of repeat business – the best kind for a mushroom grower, as you’ll have fresh mushrooms to sell every week.

2. **Grocery Stores**: Many people turn to grocery stores to find the mushrooms they’re looking for. In particular, it’s a good idea to target grocery stores that carry exotic mushrooms and produce. These are often “upscale” grocers, which frequently cater to customers interested in buying premium mushrooms. Oyster mushrooms have a fairly short shelf life, which is an advantage for local growers who can pick and deliver the same day.
3. **Farmers’ Markets:** Farmers’ markets routinely draw big crowds eager to buy from the best local growers. In particular, many people turn to farmers’ markets to find mushrooms they can’t find at their local grocery store. Set up a stand or booth and get selling. If the spots at your local farmers’ market are all sold out, then consider asking another grower if you can share their stand or booth.

4. **Dried Mushrooms:** For less-than-perfect mushrooms that you don’t want to sell, consider drying them. This can turn into a great market for you and your mushroom-growing business. It’s fairly easy too. Most food dryers/dehydrators should do a good job of drying.

### Questions About Growing Oyster Mushrooms

**Why Oyster Mushrooms?**

Exotic mushrooms are enjoying a high level of demand. Last year alone, Americans grew more than a million and a half pounds of exotic mushrooms. Oyster mushrooms, a type of exotic mushroom, are one of the easiest exotic mushrooms to grow. They can grow in about six weeks’ time, and are currently selling for about $12 a pound. They’re fairly easy to grow, they grow quickly, and they can make you good money – all reasons why you should choose oyster mushrooms to grow for profit.

**How Should I Get My Spawn?**

There are two ways you can get your spawn. You can make your own using a sterile culture or buy ready-to-inoculate spawn from a supplier.

**How Can I Increase My Sales?**

Give out free samples of your oyster mushrooms. This is how you’ll be able to sell to grocery stores and restaurants. They’ll want to taste your mushrooms before buying them. If a grocery store allows, put on demonstrations. Handing out free
samples of your oyster mushrooms (lightly sautéed in butter tastes great!) is a great way to increase business.

**How Much Growing Area Do I Need?**

Because oyster and shiitake mushrooms are so productive, you can get started with a very small space, as little as 100 square feet. You can use a backyard shed, barn or even a basement or spare room. Remember, each square foot of growing area can produce up to 25 pounds of mushrooms in a year.

**What Should I Use For A Substrate?**

A substrate is your growing medium. Growers usually use straw for oyster mushrooms and hardwood sawdust for shiitake mushrooms.

**What If I Can’t Sell My Mushrooms Right Away?**

Your oyster mushrooms will be at their best when they are fresh. That's when you want to sell them. If you can't sell them right away, freeze or dry them to sell later. Freezing or drying enables you to sell your oyster mushrooms days or months in the future.

To learn more about growing these productive and profitable mushrooms, read *Growing Gourmet Mushrooms For Profit*, which also includes information about growing the popular shiitake mushroom, at: [www.profitableplantsdigest.com](http://www.profitableplantsdigest.com).
Growing Ornamental Grasses For Profit

Because ornamental grasses are drought-tolerant and low maintenance, landscapers are using more and more of them, as are homeowners. Because there are hundreds of shapes and sizes, they can be used for everything from ground covers to privacy screens. It's easy to get started growing ornamental grasses, as you simply buy the "mother" plants and divide the root clump into new plants as it grows. Using pots, it's possible to grow thousands of plants in a small backyard nursery.

Five Profitable Ornamental Grasses For Your Backyard Nursery

So you'd like to turn your backyard nursery into a garden of profitable plants. One of the best possibilities is ornamental grasses.

Ornamental grasses are fairly easy to grow and are high in demand. What separates them from regular grasses is their distinctive form or color. They also vary in size, from six-inch tufts, all the way to twenty-foot giants. Plus, they have a lot of uses.

Landscapers love them, because they can be used as a ground cover, specimen plants, near ponds and more. Decorators and floral arrangers enjoy using them
as cut flowers and everlastings. Cities love them for urban landscaping, because of their tolerance to poor soil and air pollution.

Ornamental grasses offer a huge range of choices for growers. That’s why they’re perfect for you to grow. When deciding on what ornamental grasses to grow, be sure to ask around and find out what landscapers are looking for. If you can grow quality plants at reasonable prices, you could see a lot of business. Be sure to keep in mind your climate and environment when deciding specific varieties to grow.

To get you started, here are some profitable ornamental grasses you could grow right in your backyard plant nursery:

- **Blue Lyme Grass**: This is truly the bluest of the blue ornamental grasses. It’s tough and can spread quickly. That’s why it’s a top ornamental grass for erosion control. At top height, it’ll be about 30 inches tall.

- **Fountain Grass**: This is one of the most popular ornamental grasses with growers. It can produce mounds of six-inch flower heads. Plus, with the right care it can grow up to five feet tall.

- **Ribbon Grass**: This sometimes goes by the nickname, “gardener’s garters.” It spreads like bamboo, and can quickly grow to three feet in height. Best of all, it can tolerate a variety of soil and moisture conditions.

- **Switch Grass**: This has been used for years by the Soil Conservation Service as it can provide soil control and cover for wildlife. It frequently grows four to six feet tall.

- **Purple Moor Grass**: A breeze can set them in motion, earning them the nickname of “dancing grass.” The tall form of purple moor grass is known as “Windspiel,” and can grow up to six feet tall, with purple flowers arriving in the summer. “Variegata” is the small form, which grows to a height of three feet.
• **Blue Oat Grass:** When it is fully grown, it looks like a blue hedgehog! It prefers a well-drained soil and plenty of sun.

• **Feather Reed Grass:** This is one of the best to grow. Not only is it easy to grow, but it can tolerate most soils and drought.

• **Giant Reed:** This ornamental grass can top out at 20 feet in height and has bamboo-like stalks.

• **Northern Sea Oats:** At first glance, these look like a 3-foot tall bamboo plant. The leaves turn a bright bronze color in the fall.

Ornamental grasses can also be grown for drying and dyeing. Switch grass, plume grass, rabbit tail grass and eulalia grass are popular types that are frequently grown for drying. If you’d like to dye your grasses, you could find even more interest in them. It’s quite simple and can lead to big sales at gift shops and craft shops. Try growing these ornamental grasses in your backyard plant nursery. Sell them as is, or you could consider drying or dyeing them. Many growers find drying and dyeing are an excellent "value-added" way to turn the season’s surplus into profits.

To learn more about growing these fascinating and profitable grasses, read: *How to Start a Profitable Backyard Plant Nursery*, available at our web site: [www.profitableplants.com](http://www.profitableplants.com).
Growing Garlic For Profit

Garlic is a member of the same family as onions, shallots, leeks and chives. For thousands of years, garlic has been used for cooking and medicinal purposes. Recent scientific research has proven many of the historical claims for garlic's health-giving and medicinal powers. Its chemical ingredients can fight bacteria, lower cholesterol levels and act as an organic insecticide.

According to a Vegetable Crops Specialist at Cornell University, “There’s a booming market out there for fresh local garlic. Those growing it can sell every clove they produce. Elephant garlic, for example, retails for $12 a pound and produces up to 15,000 pounds per acre.”

Garlic is an ideal crop for the small grower, as its labor intensive and almost foolproof. Because it tolerates a wide variety of soils and weather, it’s very hard to lose a crop. For decades, growers have nicknamed garlic “the mortgage lifter” for that very reason.

Most small growers use “value-added” techniques to get a higher price for their garlic, such as garlic braids, and garlic powder. One Pennsylvania grower, has found even more ways to add value to his garlic crop. In addition to selling bulbs and braids, he sells “garlic gardens” sized to grow on a windowsill. He also discovered that the Chinese have long harvested the garlic greens for seasoning,
much like chives, so he now sells greens and a recipe for garlic greens pesto sauce for $15 a pound in season!

There are two types of garlic, soft neck and hard neck. Soft neck garlic is what you'll find in almost all grocery stores. Small growers can do better with gourmet hard neck varieties, as they are more flavorful, do better in colder climates and produce larger cloves. Popular hard neck varieties include Porcelain, Rocambole and Purple Stripe. Another popular gourmet garlic is Elephant garlic, so named because the bulbs are huge. Elephant garlic has a milder flavor than most garlics, which may account for its popularity.

The gourmet garlic varieties bring higher prices – over $12 a pound is common - from food lovers who appreciate the distinct flavors. These higher prices translate into a very profitable crop. Another important consideration – customers who love gourmet garlic expect to be able to buy organic. So you should use organic practices, fertilizers and pest controls to insure that your garlic will meet organic standards. Typically, organic garlic brings higher prices as well.

Next, make sure your garlic is growing up healthy and strong. Check to see if your soil has a Ph between 6.2 and 6.8. That’s what garlic prefers. Look for weeds, pests and any disease problems. You also need to make sure your soil is well-drained. Waterlogged soil can lead to a lot of problems. Consider growing your garlic in a raised bed, which will help with drainage. A bed that is at least six inches high should do the trick.

Start planting your bulbs and seed cloves about six weeks before the first frost of fall. When planting your bulbs and cloves, try to plant them four to six inches apart. When you have years of experience you can start planting them even closer together.

Garlic growers will keep more profits if they sell direct to the public. One of the best is the Saturday market, or Farmer's markets. Farmers’ markets continue to
be popular events that draw big crowds eager to find the best local produce from the best local growers. That could be you.

Set up a stand or stall, and put your garlic on display. Consider putting out a sign-up sheet for a mailing list, so you can keep in contact with your customers. Farmers’ markets can fill up fast, so if you’re not able to rent a stand or a stall, consider asking another grower if you can share one with them.

Making value-added products is your chance to get creative with garlic. You can make several products with garlic. For one, you can make a safe garlic-based insecticide. You can also make a deer repellent. Or what about taking your “cull” garlic bulbs (ones with blemishes or an odd shape) and filling a half-pound mesh bag that you tie off at the top. This can make for an excellent natural flea repellant. Garlic greens are popular Spring sellers at any Farmer's markets.

With a steady demand and high prices, gourmet garlic could be just the backyard cash crop to boost your bank account. To learn more, read: *Growing Garlic For Profit*, available at: profitableplantsdigest.com.
Value-Added Plants

Bonsai

Bonsai is the popular Japanese method, which involves stunting trees and shrubs without altering the natural appearance. Most commercial growers sell bonsai plants in three types: starter plants, trained plants and specimen plants. Prices vary based on size, what type of bonsai and the overall appearance. Although collectors pay thousands for prime specimens, popular sellers are usually younger trees priced under $100.

Hypertufa

Hypertufa is a light weight artificial stone that's quite simple to make. Mix three parts Portland cement, four parts peat and five parts perlite. You can use everyday plastic containers for moulds. The finished container can be filled with one or more plants, and you're on your way to a big seller. It's a great way to sell a $3 plant for $20. One local grower embeds a small piece of fused glass in each hypertufa container, fills them with succulents, and sells thousands of dollars worth of them at the Saturday market.

Table-Top Christmas Trees

More and more people are living in apartments and condos and don't have room for a full-sized Christmas tree. That's why you could make some nice money growing table-top Christmas trees. Two varieties, in particular, are widely used: Elwood cedar and Italian stone pine. Living varieties, in an pot, are the most popular, as they can be moved to a patio after the holiday season and be enjoyed year-round.
Trellised Plants

You can add value to a plant by training it on a simple trellis, as opposed to a stake. How does making double the original amount sound? You can make a trellis by taking cedar fencing boards, ripping them into narrow strips and using an electric stapler or brad nailer. Trellising works best for bigger pot sizes, such as the 3-5 gallon containers, as a trellis can provide stability.

Lavender farming can produce a substantial income for small growers. The fresh flowers are sold in bundles or used to make lavender oil, and the dried flower bunches are sold to florists and hobbyists for dried arrangements and wreaths. The harvested lavender is also used to make dozens of value-added products, from dried buds to aromatherapy products, skin-care products, sachets and herbal pillows. All are easy to make and in demand from consumers who love the scent of lavender. That’s the beauty of lavender – unlike other perishable crops, nothing goes to waste, and profits are year-round.

When Mike & Jadyne Reichner decided to try growing lavender, they started with just 19 plants and earned a first-year profit of $88. In the few years since then, they have expanded their growing area to 7 acres, with thousands of plants, dozens of value-added products like lavender soaps and potted lavender plants, and now gross over one million dollars a year!

Because demand for lavender and lavender products is booming, there is an opportunity for others to start growing lavender on a small scale as well, and cash in on the growth of the lavender business. Lavender farming can be a small as a backyard patch of a few dozen plants to acres of plants. For example, Rosemary Litz grows just 80 plants in her Colorado backyard, using the harvested lavender to create hand-crafted products she makes with her sewing machine such as decorative sachets and herbal pillows. As you can see, there is
room in the lavender world for growers of all sizes. It’s an ideal part-time business that can produce a tidy income year-round.

Lavender is a long-lasting herb with a lifespan of 12-15 years in the ground. New plants are usually produced from cuttings, so it’s easy to replace older plants, expand your growing area or produce lavender plants for sale at almost no cost. In addition, because lavender is so easy to dry, it can be used to make value-added products year-round instead of just during the growing season.

You can start a lavender growing business with just a small amount of money – as little as a few hundred dollars for plant starts and hand tools. Lavender is an easy plant to grow, and is quite disease-free as long as you give the plants well-drained soil, as it hates wet feet.

Most lavender growers agree the best way for new growers to ensure their success is to “add value” by selling lavender products in addition to just fresh cut lavender flowers. Here are just a few examples of value-added products you can sell:

- **Dried Lavender Bundles:** Crafters and florists use dried lavender bunches to create floral arrangements, wreaths and other craft products. Drying the bunches is simple – just hang upside-down in a well-ventilated space.

- **Sachets:** There are dozens of uses for lavender sachets, so they are steady sellers at Saturday markets, retail stores and to repeat customers. Sachets are used in bath bags, in closets and drawers as an air freshener, in the dryer to give clothes a delicate lavender fresh scent, and even in pillows to promote restful sleep. One enterprising grower wholesales thousands of decorative sachet bags to local retailers every year.

- **Aromatherapy Oil:** Lavender oil is one of the most used essential oils, valued for its calming, soothing effect. Many growers sell the oil in small personal sized bottles as well as in personal care products like lotions, creams and shampoo.
• **Lavender Soap:** This popular value-added product is always a big repeat seller and gift item. The affordable basic lavender bars are best-sellers.

• **Lavender Lotions:** With markups of 500% to 1,000%, its no wonder so many cosmetics entrepreneurs have become millionaires! Unlike mass-market factory-made products, small growers can use their lavender oil to make lotions, creams, ointments and shampoos with all-natural ingredients.

If you would like to learn more about this aromatic specialty crop, visit: [www.profitableplantsdigest.com](http://www.profitableplantsdigest.com), where you’ll find several articles about growing lavender for profit, and details about our growing guide, *LAVENDER FARMING – HOW TO START A LAVENDER BUSINESS.*
Profitable Indoor Microgreens

Big Profits From Small Plants

For many years, microgreens were grown primarily for sale to upscale restaurants. These tiny plants are used as a garnish for main dishes like fish or pork to add color and taste, served as a mini-salad, or added to a salad of larger leaves such as spinach or arugula.

Today, that has all changed, and microgreens have become widely known and used, not just by trendy chefs and “foodies,” but by anyone who appreciates fresh, tasty food. One food writer called it the “microgreening of America.” National Public Radio recently named microgreens one of the new “culinary buzzwords,” and the National Restaurant Association calls microgreens one of the top five food trends.

When a food goes from unknown to a hot food trend, there is money to be made. Unlike most other specialty food crops, microgreens are easy to grow, and can be ready to sell in just ten to twenty days. They can be grown indoors or outdoors, so microgreens are a perfect crop for urban farmers who may not have access to a patch of dirt. In fact, many small growers prefer indoor growing, as it allows more control over light and temperature, so crops can be grown more quickly, and harvests are more predictable.

Because microgreens are expensive, selling for $20 to $50 a pound, growers can produce a solid income in a very small space compared to traditional farming. For example, growing microgreens on a rack or shelving system that uses vertical space more efficiently can produce several pounds per square foot per month.
What Are Microgreens?

Microgreens are tiny, edible greens that are older than a sprout and younger than a full-grown plant. Microgreens are harvested after their first true leaves have developed, before they develop into larger plants. They are the smallest of the salad greens and herbs, smaller than the “baby greens,” and can be grown from almost any plant variety that would produce a mature plant, such as arugula, spinach, radish or basil.

What’s The Difference Between Microgreens and Sprouts?

Microgreens are not sprouts. Sprouts are just germinated seeds, grown in water, that are eaten whole, with the seed, root and stem still attached. Microgreens are not grown in water. They are produced in soil or a sterile medium such as a fiber mat. They require plenty of light, low humidity and good air circulation. The seed density is low compared to sprouting, which allows plenty of room for each tiny plant to grow and develop. At harvest, they are cut and packed without any roots.

When microgreens are harvested, their flavor is often more intense than the mature plant, like the spicy micro-radish or micro-mizuna. This intense flavor is part of their culinary appeal. The most common microgreens come from the crucifer, or cabbage, family of plants, and are packed with vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. So not only do microgreens supply flavor, texture and color to a salad or main dish, they're also nutritious! Some of the most common microgreens are amaranth, arugula, beets, basil, cabbage, celery, chard, cilantro, cress, kale, mustard, parsley, radish and sorrel. Most commercial growers also offer microgreen mixes for a blend of tastes and colors.
You can start a microgreen business with just a small amount of money - as little as a few hundred dollars for seeds and supplies. Microgreens mature quickly, so it is not uncommon for growers to earn back their investment quickly, or use their profits to expand their growing business. It doesn't matter how much growing space you have, or gardening experience. If you can spare as little as an hour a day, you can start growing micro greens for profit.

One successful grower, Kate Brun, went from growing in the sunroom of her home to a 400 square foot greenhouse, then a 1,600 square foot greenhouse in about a year. Kate grows several varieties of organic microgreens, from broccoli and arugula to sunflower and popcorn. In addition to her regular restaurant and grocery customers, she sells her greens at several local farmers’ markets.

She says, “As far as a chef is concerned, microgreens are like a bow on a present. You can wrap it in paper, and it'll still be good, but if you put a fancy bow on top, it becomes gorgeous.” One of her chefs loves her microgreens because, “I can utilize every pound or ounce I buy. It makes for a way prettier plate, and makes everything a little more polished and refined.”

Our growing guide, Growing Microgreens For Profit, gives new growers all the information they need to get started growing this specialty crop. You'll find more information about the book, as well as dozens of free articles about growing these tiny and tasty greens, at: www.profitableplantsdigest.com.
Japanese Maples

How to Make $45,000 Growing Japanese Maples For Profit

For hundreds of years, Japanese maples (Acer palmatum) have been grown and admired by gardeners, who view them as a "collector's tree" because of their unique beauty. These lovely trees make a unique addition to any garden, with foliage ranging from delicate lacy leaves to variegated leaves in a rainbow of colors from red and green to pinks and white highlights. Landscape designers love Japanese maples because they can be used in so many ways in the landscape.

Most retail garden centers and nurseries simply don't have the space to display more than a few of the hundreds of varieties, so it can be hard for a retail customer to find exactly the right Japanese maple for needs. That is why a small specialty tree nursery business with a good selection of varieties can do so well, both in profitability and in attracting customers who are looking for that "perfect" tree, such as a landscape designer or homeowner.

Because Japanese maples are smaller trees, they can also be easily grown in containers to allow more plants in the same space – ideal for those growers with limited space. A backyard nursery can hold hundreds of these sought-after trees, and at the high prices for most varieties, even a small growing area can produce thousands of dollars of profit each year.
There are hundreds of cultivars of this beautiful tree, with endless variations of color, form, leaf type and size. It can be downright confusing for a beginner, so just remember that most Japanese maples fall into two broad types, broad leaf and cut leaf, and two primary colors, red and green. The cut leaf – also called lace leaf - varieties are referred to as "dissectum," for example, Acer palmatum "dissectum."

Common examples of each variety are:

- **Japanese Red Maple**: This is a spectacular tree for fall color, with red leaves in summer that turn even brighter red in fall. Also popular are the attractive dissectum varieties, with deeply cut feathery leaves and a weeping shape.

- **Crimson Queen Japanese Maple**: This dwarf variety only reaches ten feet in height at maturity. With its frilly leaves and weeping branches, it makes an outstanding specimen tree.

- **Cutleaf Green Japanese Maple**: This is the "standard" cultivar for the green dissectums. A dwarf variety, it reaches only six feet at maturity, with green dissected leaves in summer, turning golden in the fall.

Growing Japanese maples can be a very profitable "niche" tree nursery business if you can supply the essential ingredients for success:

- Most varieties are hardy in zones 5 to 9, so be sure your regional climate falls into this range.

- Many varieties require partial shade for protection from the hot summer sun. A simple and inexpensive shade cloth canopy over a growing area can provide this.

- New growers must be patient, as it can take several years to grow out the larger specimen trees that bring high prices. For more immediate income, grow the common varieties from seed or seedling in one-gallon pots, which can be sold in a year or so.
If you're looking for a profitable niche in the world of landscaping trees, Japanese maples could be just right for you. The rewards go beyond just profits, as the satisfaction of creating these beautiful trees goes beyond money. A side benefit is having a small collection of these specimens in your yard for grafting to produce even more unique trees.

Our growing guide, *Growing Trees For Profit*, includes a section on how to start a tree nursery specializing in Japanese maples, and covers the ten best selling varieties, growing tips and techniques, and a resource section that will tell you where to find the best books and videos on these lovely trees, as well as wholesale sources for seeds, seedlings and other essential supplies.

The book also covers several other specialized tree “niches,” such as bonsai trees, heirloom fruit and nut trees, high-value tree products like the figured wood used to make musical instruments and even that proven money-maker, Christmas trees. To learn more about these profitable trees, visit [www.profitableplantsdigest.com](http://www.profitableplantsdigest.com).

**Although it takes time to build an inventory of high quality Japanese maples, it can be worth the wait. Current prices of common varieties like Bloodgood at retail nurseries are $80 to $120 for six foot tall potted trees, and $125 to $200 for 2" caliper (trunk diameter) trees. Rare varieties can bring twice as much.**
Profitable Woody Ornamentals

Grow "Woodies" And Harvest Profits For 20-30 Years!

Woody ornamentals, also known as woody cuts, or simply "woodies," are trees and shrubs whose branches are harvested and sold to florists and individuals for floral arrangements and craft products such as wreaths. Most woodies have colorful stems, like Red Twig dogwood, unusual stems like curly willow, or stems with attractive berries, buds or flowers. Some of the well-known woodies include holly in winter, pussy willows in spring and smoke tree, forsythia and hydrangea in spring and summer.

Unlike annual plants like flowers and vegetables, woodies can be harvested over and over again for many years. There is no annual tilling, planting or soil preparation. Woodies can also provide a year-round harvest income, as different species are ready to harvest during all four seasons. For example, witch hazel can be harvested and sold in early spring, then ninebark in spring and summer, filberts and smoke tree in summer, boxwood and beautyberry in the fall and nandina, wax myrtle and holly in the winter.

Outside Washington, D.C, in the rural suburbs of Maryland, Leon and Carol Carrier have turned their two-acre lot into a money making woody ornamental nursery. You’ll find old crabapple and dogwood trees that yield profitable branches every year, as well as more unusual plants, like Magnolia grandiflora that could easily be called their “money tree.” The tree’s long lasting leafy stem
bunches bring about $6 each at the farmer’s market, and one tree produces over 120 bunches!

A growing bed full of best-selling winterberry is a popular item during the winter holiday season, producing hundreds of single stems that bring $3 each at the market. The row of winterberry plants was established 14 years ago, and will be producing steady income for years to come. Another bed holds flowering quince, which can produce as much as $800 worth of stems per plant, per year.

Katherine Lewis, a basket maker, weaves willow baskets and she and her husband, Steve Lospalluto, grow a variety of colored stem willows on their Washington state farm, Dunbar Gardens. The willow stems are harvested, bundled and sold to other basket makers in the area, who value the wide range of colored willow stems that bring life to their woven creations.

In addition, they sell willow cuttings to crafters and anyone who wants to grow willow to harvest. The willow plants at the farm are tightly spaced, as close as 9 inches apart in rows only 32 inches apart, to keep the stems from getting too large for basketry. Some of the stem harvest for sale is bundles of 8-12 inch cuttings to start new plants. This allows weavers to create amazingly colorful baskets and other craft items such as wreaths and garden ornaments, even furniture.

Researchers at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture recently did a detailed study of the profit potential for just one woody species, willow, and concluded that smaller plots of 1/4 to 1 acre could produce a return of up to $56,000 per acre!

Because demand for woody ornamentals is increasing, there is an opportunity for new growers to start producing woody stems on a small scale and cash in on that demand. Shipping woodies is expensive, and can often damage delicate buds
and flowers, in addition to reducing vase life. That's why florists and other woody users prefer to buy local to insure freshness and higher quality.

Many woodies can be dried and sold year-round. For example, there is a huge demand for dried hydrangeas from crafters and florists. Also, many woodies can be used to create wreaths and other craft products such as woven willow baskets, even rustic woven willow furniture. One grower produces willow rocking chairs and sells out each year! Also, the fruit of two woodies, flowering quince and rose hips, is used for making value-added jams, jellies and chutney.

Although there are growers that produce woodies on up to 160 acres, most are much smaller growers, with as little as a quarter or half acre. There is room in the woody growing world for growers of all sizes. It's an ideal part-time business that can produce a substantial income year-round.

Most woodies are long-lasting perennial plants with a lifespan of 20-60 years. In fact, Europeans harvest woody stems from plants that are hundreds of years old! New plants are usually produced from cuttings, so it's easy to replace older plants, expand your growing area, or produce potted woodies for sale to local buyers or the local garden center.

You can start a woody ornamental business with just a small amount of money - as little as a few hundred dollars for plant starts and other supplies. Woodies are easy plants to grow, and most are quite disease and pest free. Growing woodies is also an ideal part-time business for new growers who have full-time jobs, as much of the work can be done when time is available.

Visit our website, [www.profitableplantsdigest.com](http://www.profitableplantsdigest.com) to learn more about growing these very profitable plants. You'll also find details about our growing guide: *Growing Woody Ornamentals For Profit.*
I hope you've enjoyed learning more about the world of growing specialty plants for profit. It's a business that can be started for just a few dollars – I know a few growers who've started with $50 worth of seeds and some hand tools - or with a bigger budget that affords a small greenhouse or hoophouse to extend the growing season. Many growers are part-timers, who see growing for profit in their backyard nursery a welcome relief from the stress of their day job. Others prefer to spend all their time working with plants.

These are my favorite specialty crops, as they are proven steady sellers year after year, yet can be grown by anyone who has, or can learn, the basic gardening skills to grow them. One or more of them could be the foundation for your new gardening business, and the source of a nice income for years to come. So get growing!

If you're ready to start your own backyard plant growing business, be sure to bookmark www.profitableplants.com and www.profitableplantsdigest.com, as I will be adding new articles and books regularly. If you have any questions or comments about what you've read in this eBook, I'd love to hear from you. Just visit either web site, and use the contact form to get in touch....

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