

### **ForestHER podcast. Season 1. Episode 3. Forest crafts**

- 1) Becky Barlow (BB): Most people do not think of managing a forest to produce leaves, cones, mosses, and/or vines for a profit. But the responsible management and harvest of these “non-timber forest products” contributes substantially to U.S. floral industry. These can also be collected on a small-scale for personal use to decorate your home, or for fun crafts that can be used to introduce children to nature. Today, we will explore the topic of non-timber forest products, discuss how they can be managed and harvested responsibly, and give you some example craft ideas. I’m Becky Barlow, and this is ForestHER.
- 2) BB: In 2018, the US Florist Industry was valued at \$11 billion. About 60% of that or \$6.9 billion was generated by brick and mortar retail shops, while the online florist industry revenue was about \$4.1 billion during that time. Natural products such as leaves, ferns, cones and moss are popular in floral arrangements. Take a quick look at your local flower shop or craft store, or on websites that feature crafts and handmade items and you will no doubt see grape vine wreaths and baskets, preserved leaves or branches, pine cones, and mosses for sale individually or as parts of arrangements. And many of these items are found naturally in forests of the southeastern United States.
- 3) BB: Managing forests for non-timber forest products can benefit a landowner in a few ways. First, non-timber forest products are produced naturally, and they can be harvested and sold yearly or on a short-term basis to generate revenue for a landowner. Second, the active management of these products, when done responsibly, can promote overall forest health. Finally, you can use products from your forest to make decorations for your home. And if you don’t own your own forestland many of these items can be picked up in rural or suburban yards for your own use. A few years ago, I met a teacher who collected freshly fallen pine needles from her yard. She then gathered the needles into small, neat bundles, and sold those bundles to basketry artists. And that got me thinking, wow, there are a lot of opportunities for landowners to collect non-timber forest products like pinecones, branches, and vines from their land to use for crafts, no matter how large or small the acreage they own.
- 4) Kelly Knowles (KK): I’m Kelly Knowles, and I am an Outreach Programs Administrator with the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Extension Office. My background is in graphic design, that’s what my degree from Auburn is in. I worked for an advertising firm right out of college, then I started working for the university in 2005.
- 5) BB: So, while Kelly is not the person I mentioned earlier who sold the pine straw from her yard, she is a friend and an artist who has an eye for design, and I thought she would be great person to help me with ideas for craft items that can be made from non-timber forest products. This past summer, Kelly and I walked around her yard with her children Andrué and Savannah to look for pinecones, sticks, and other natural objects that could be turned into crafts.
- 6) KK: Savannah, look for the pinecones or the twigs. Can you pick up some sticks? Yeah. You got a stick? That one’s falling apart. Can you find me a different one? So what we are looking for today is twigs, to do like a twig arrangement on the table. And then we are going to do pinecone

birdfeeders. Thought the kids might enjoy that. Then I'm interested in using found objects to make a table scape that way you are not buying a bunch of stuff that you can just find the materials in the forest to make the decorations, and then you also get to get out of the house especially now during Covid. It is nice to get the kids out and give them something to do!

- 7) BB: Cones from pines native to the southeastern US– like Longleaf, Slash, Loblolly, and Shortleaf pines – are popular in floral designs, and they can sell for \$0.50 - \$1.00 each. Cones from western pine trees – like Ponderosa, Jeffery, Pinyon, Lodgepole are also used and may sell for about \$0.20- \$0.40 each. Kelly and her kids used the loblolly pinecones we collected to make natural birdfeeders.
- 8) KK: We're making the pinecone birdfeeders. And we are making them with Crisco incase someone has a nut allergy, and we bought some birdseed, and have some pinecones. And we have some floral wire to hang it up with in a tree. And you just kinda wrap the wire around the top part of the pinecone and kinda leave it as a hook so you can tie it onto the tree. Savannah has helped me slather the pinecones with Crisco and then we patted on the birdseed. And Savannah said that this is her favorite craft that we've done. I'm assuming because it's a big mess and then your hands get goeey, and so that's fun of course for a three-year-old, too. On one of them I've done a little bow at the top just to kinda make it decorative. You can use ribbon instead of floral wire. But I kinda tied the ribbon on the top of the pinecone. It's pretty simple. We used the Crisco and put it all around the pinecone. And you want a pinecone that's open so you can get the Crisco down in there so that the birdseed is pushed between the pinecone. So, that was pretty quick and easy, and then of course, it was Savannah's favorite!
- 9) BB: Branches and leaves are also commonly used in floral designs and crafts. Willow branches are common in spring arrangements. Oak leaves and twigs can be dried and preserved for use in fall floral arrangements. Leaves of trees that are commonly used in winter arrangements include magnolia, American holly, Eastern red cedar, and southern pines.
- 10) KK: Today we are doing twig bundles. The kids helped me pick up twigs and branches that I can then use to do this craft. I like to decorate in numbers of three usually. So, either three different sizes of things to decorate or three different colors and group them together that way. So today, I'm making these twig bundles and you will need twigs, or branches, pruning shears, twine, and you can use rubber bands as well to help you hold them together while you tie the twine on. But I didn't end up using the rubber band at all but you can do that. And what I did was I started with what would be the center of each of the groupings and then kinda made a bouquet around it in different sizes. When I finished, I stood it up and kinda cut off the bottom of each one of the bundles so they are three different sizes, small, medium, and large to use on a table scape. And then I tied them with twine. And I think they turned out nicely. Mine were a little heavier and a little more, I don't know, rustic looking, they were taller and branches kinda curled out more than what I had seen that gave me the idea for this. So, what I did is I got three different size Mason jars and I put the twig bundles that were wrapped with the twine inside the jars. And then I felt like it was missing something so I got some rustic orange ribbon

and tied it around the top of the Mason jars. And I'll share the pictures with you. I decorated with my fall placemats which are leaves. And I think it turned out nicely!

- 11) BB: And finally, while on our walk, we found some muscadine and Japanese honeysuckle vines growing at the edge of Kelly's yard. Muscadine is a native species of grape that is common in unburned forests of the Southeastern US. Japanese Honeysuckle is a non-native vine also found in many parts the United States. While planting and/or cultivating Japanese honeysuckle is never recommended, cutting vines and following up with herbicide treatments can be a way to start to treat and reduce the spread of it on your property. Kelly came up with a way to make decorative "pumpkins" with the vines, but vines are also often used to make wreaths and baskets.
  
- 12) KK: Today we are making vine pumpkins. Supplies that you need are lots, and lots of vines. And you are gonna need floral wire, and you're gonna need wire cutters so that you can cut the wire. And we are using honeysuckle vines just simply because that is what was available. But you could use grape vines, or muscadine vines, or any vine that you can find. Though a lot of trial and error what I found works best is to soak the vines for 30 minutes and then weave them into a rope that's, I don't know, about one-half and inch to an inch thick. And you want to have a rope that is a pretty good length, maybe ten feet. Hold them in your hand and make a spiral, and make it really tight. Don't make them really large loops because if you do you are going to big open really whimsical pumpkins. But you can. Some people like that so you can do it that way. But what I think might work best is a tighter weave, and so you want to make your circles kinda small. And then you want to use either brown or green floral wire and tie them around the center of where you are holding the loop tight. And then when you get finished you release it and kinda arrange them in a circle that would be the pumpkin. And when you are arranging them in the tight spiral circle you want to leave the end poking out the top like it's the stem of the pumpkin. And then once you've secured it with the floral wire several times around and then just to make it secure you can even go up the "stem" to make it look more like a stem if you wanted to do that. Or if you wanted to leave it more loose you could do that as well for a more whimsical pumpkin. My first one, obviously looks very whimsical and then the second one that I do, um later, will be tighter and more of a, uh, exact pumpkin shape. Anyway, I hope this forest crafts podcast was fun for y'all! It was fun for me and my family. And getting us out of the house during this "quarantine" season of life, I guess.
  
- 13) BB: The thoughtful management of non-timber forest products can benefit landowners and their land. But there is always the potential for native forests and associated ecosystems to be exploited by illegal or over harvesting. Never harvest non-timber forest products from public lands, or land that you do not own without permission. And consult a forester or other land management professional if you would like actively manage for non-timber forest products on your property. There are pictures of the projects Kelly described and more information on non-timber forest products at the "Resources" link found on the ForestHER podcast page. You can also contact one of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System Forestry, Wildlife or Natural Resource Agents working in your county who are always happy to help. And don't forget to check the Alabama Cooperative Extension System calendar for upcoming workshops both online or live and in person in your area.

14) BB: Thanks for listening! We hope you enjoyed learning about non-timber forest products and will join us for future ForestHER podcasts. In the meantime, remember - find your voice, be bold, and do good things for your land.