Specialty Crops for Small Plot Farming

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Ontario

What is a specialty crop?

- A niche crop not covered by mainstream agriculture
- Typically low acreage, non-traditional crops
- May be new to the region or an underutilized species
- Re-emerging crop

Why do people grow specialty crops?

- New farm business
- Need a new challenge
- Draw customers
- Increase revenues to create a better financial situation/ risk management / gain more control of the market chain
- Improve cash flow and off-season income
- Expand on-farm employment (farm family members/next generation)

Here are just a few examples of specialty crops in Ontario:

- Hops
- Sweet potatoes
- Quinoa
- Grain Amaranth
- Teff
- Cape gooseberry
- Haskap
- Goji berry
- Sea buckthorn
- Pawpaw
- Edamame
- Callaloo
- Bitter melon
- Luffa
- Specialty mushrooms
- Mouse melon
- Fuzzy melon
- Bottle gourd
- Globe artichoke
- Okra
- Specialty eggplant
- Tomatillo
- Myoga
- Belgin endive
- Wild ginger
- Sansho
- Black cohosh
- Persimmon
- Edible flowers
- Poppy
- Parsley
- Walnut
- Heartnut
- Hazelnut
- Lemon balm
- Wild yam
- Sage
- Russian dandelion
- Wild rice
- Northern kiwi
- Aronia
- Wasabi
- Popcorn
- Stevia
- Castor
- Jerusalem artichoke
- Lavendar
- Ginseng
- Tobacco
- Peanuts
- Elderberries
- Truffles
- Kenaf
- Miscanthus
- Etc.

Specialty Crops

NOT FOR EVERYONE OR EVERY FARM:

- No defined market
- Unknown or limited cost of production information
- Difficult to obtain desired cultivars
- Limited pest control products
- Typically labour intensive
- Can be capital intensive
- May be difficult to finance start-up
- Does it fit with your goals or current production system?

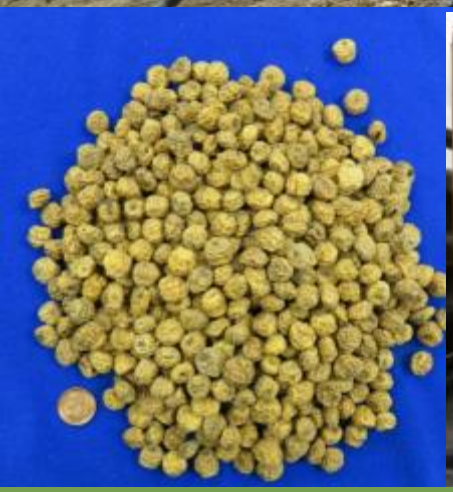
BUT, specialty crops may provide opportunities – including small plot farming…

Examples today:

- Tigernut (research)
- Cape Gooseberry (research, limited production)
- Hops (research, wide spread production)

Tigernut
(*Cyperus esculentus* var. sativus)

- One known processor in Ontario, others in N.A.
- Potential market to date: 700 000 kg/yr
- Yield: 2000-3000 kg/ha (Ontario field trials)
- Potential acreage: 200-240 ha (~500-600 ac)
- Preliminary research stage in Ontario



Cape Gooseberry

(*Physalis peruviana* L.)

Common names: Glodenberry, Ground cherry*

*Ground cherry: *P. pubescens*

- Typically small production, farmers' market/on-farm market sales
- Starting to expand for wholesale production in Ontario (2018)
- Ontario research: season extension
- Yield: ~2 kg/plant
- 3k-4k plants/ha

http://www.terra-fertil.co.uk/dried/goldenberry/

Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)

- Perennial
- Becoming more competitive
- High cost of establishment and mechanization
- Requires mechanization over 0.5 acres
- 10-15 acre range for potential sole-source income
- Yields: 445-1600 lbs/acre dry
- Price/lb: $9-29/lb dry depending on market (cultivar, year, availability, production type)

Simcoe Specialty Crop Team

Evan Elford, New Crop Development

Edible non-traditional horticulture crops (fruit and vegetables); specialty grains and hops

Melanie Filotas, Horticulture IPM Specialist

Pest management for specialty crops (inc. hops)

Jim Todd, Industrial Crops Specialist

Industrial, pharmaceutical and specialty oilseed crops; tobacco production

Sean Westerveld, Ginseng and Herb Specialist

Ginseng, lavender, medicinal and culinary herbs

Thank you!

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Resources:

- OMAFRA Specialty Cropportunities
- ONSpecialtyCrops Blog