

Bamboo Biz To Boom In Alabama

The start of bamboo farming in southwestern Alabama promises to lead to a business boom in the area. As growers begin to plant and harvest bamboo, the company behind the “new” crop, Resource Fiber, will be ready to put it to use.

“Our mission is to create a bamboo industry in the U.S. Alabama has the ideal soil and climate to grow it,” says Ann Knight, Resource Fiber. “We are also setting up manufacturing in southwest Alabama.”

Knight and her husband, David, were early importers of bamboo flooring to the U.S. from China. An invite from Alabama gave them the idea to set up shop there.

“We made our first planting of bamboo 2 years ago,” says Ann. “Combined, we have about 20,000 plants growing in our 100-acre nursery.”

The Moso variety is planted as a 4 to 6-ft. tall culm (jointed stem) with a 10-in. dia. root mass and a density of about 109 plants per acre. It grows 2 ft. per day and reaches a height of 80 ft. with diameters of 6 to 8 in.

The rubro variety is planted as cuttings at a density of 222 per acre. It will reach heights of 60 ft. with a 3-in. dia.

Once the bamboo trunks are harvested, new shoots develop from the root masses. Root masses will be contained with the use of a subsoiler in a 20-ft. buffer area twice a year.

“Moso bamboo is considered ready for initial harvest about 10 years after planting, with successive harvests about every 4 years after,” explains David. “Rubo is ready for harvest about 3 years after establishing it in the field.”

The company has purchased a 4,000-acre farm where they will plant the initial bamboo groves and are building their first full-scale manufacturing plant.

“We plan to move starters from the nursery to our fields in the fall of 2018 and begin providing plants to third party farmers in 2021,” says David.

While bamboo processing equipment is fairly standard, the Knights are developing and patenting harvest equipment. It is designed to do initial processing in the field, leaving waste materials to decompose.



Growers in southwest Alabama may soon be planting and harvesting bamboo. The company behind the new “crop” hopes it will lead to a business boom in the area.

“We plan to contract with growers in the area to produce bamboo for us while we develop markets for the finished products,” says Ann. “Planned products include railroad ties, truck trailer decking and other industrial products from the Moso and biocomposites from the Rubro. Biocomposites are in demand as a replacement for petroleum-based plastics.”

The Knights aren’t waiting for their bamboo to grow. They are importing bamboo from Columbia for use in their prototype factory.

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He Sells, Promotes Rare “Open Source” Garden Seeds

For Mike Dunton at Victory Seeds, promoting heirloom seeds is a mission, not a marketing gimmick.

“When we started out about 20 years ago, we were one of only a couple companies that specialized in heritage or heirloom varieties,” says Dunton. “We remain one of the few that actively works on the preservation effort. A ton of sellers have jumped on the bandwagon for marketing reasons.”

Unlike many larger operations, Dunton’s family-owned company grows out most of the seeds they sell on their farm. The ones he doesn’t grow are produced by a network of selected growers. He locates and documents rare, open-pollinated, non-GMO, non-hybrid, heirloom seeds and promotes them to home gardeners. A big part of the website is devoted to those aspects of the company mission, including 27 varieties from the Open Source Seed Initiative.

“Since our founding, the Victory Seed

Company has only offered seeds that were not only rare, open-pollinated and primarily heritage or heirloom varieties, but ones that our supporters (customers) are encouraged to propagate and save seeds from,” says Dunton. “The Open Source Seed Initiative was founded in 2012 to protect the ability to share seeds.”

The company offers more than 50 different crops from artichokes and asparagus to turnips and watermelons. There are 10 different groupings of tomatoes, with 20 varieties listed under brown and black alone. Dunton lists more than 30 under corn and 46 under salad greens. Tobacco has 57 different varieties.

“Tobacco is quite a magnificent plant, with beautiful flowers that make them a great addition to flower beds,” says Dunton.

As part of his effort to promote heritage seeds, Dunton maintains a collection of historical information on vegetable origins, WW II Victory Gardens, great American seedsmen, and more. The website offers a



Promoting heirloom seeds is a mission for Mike Dunton at Victory Seeds. His family-owned company grows most of the seeds they sell on their farm.



wealth of information on gardening as well. Dunton also offers cover crop seeds, some gardening books, hard goods and even some apparel. Tools sold on the site are handcrafted by a traditional blacksmith in Montana.

Dunton offers individual seed packets, bulk seed and a variety of seed kits - multiple seed

varieties or types, including a culinary herb seed collection.

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They Grow Veggies Of Many Colors

A photo of “rainbow carrots” caught our eye in a recent ad for a company called Seeds By Design. The Maxwell, Calif., seed company wholesales seed to other garden seed companies.

Patty Buskirk is the owner and seed breeder behind the 23-year-old company. Independent growers she works with grow many of those red, white, yellow, purple and almost black carrots we find in our favorite catalogs.

“Our Carrot Rainbow Blend is one of our top sellers,” Buskirk says. But the colors are not new. They are heirlooms that were grown in Europe before gardeners decided carrots should be orange.

“With the different colors, come different health benefits. Some are better cooked rather than eaten fresh and vice versa,”

Buskirk says. “The purple with a yellow center is incredible eaten raw.” Besides reviving heirloom varieties on 5 to 19 acres of trials each year, Buskirk and her team develop hybrid heirloom varieties with

disease resistance and other desirable traits. For example, Seeds By Design contracts with California growers to grow a series of tomatoes in different colors (orange, pink, green, yellow, white).

The company also has peppers and kale in various colors – all because of interest and demand from gardeners, Buskirk says.

“We have whole collections for niche markets,” she says. Beyond colorful vegetables, Seeds By Design supplies seed for unique salad greens, unusual eggplants, and sweet, seedless watermelons, for example. Altogether they offer 3,000 varieties of seed from 1,200 acres of vegetables grown each year.

Many of the varieties, such as Chef’s Choice Orange tomato and Black Olive Ornamental Pepper, have been selected as All-America Selection winners.

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Seeds By Design wholesales seed to other garden seed companies. “Our Carrot Rainbow Blend is one of our top sellers,” says owner Patty Buskirk.



The company develops hybrid heirloom varieties with disease resistance. They sell tomatoes, radishes, and squash in a variety of colors.

