

Lafrenz has also added camping, events, and classes to her U-Pick flower business.



She Sells Flowers And Garden Stuff

Creating Miss Effie's Country Flowers and Garden Stuff in 2002 was a way for Cathy Linker Lafrenz to work from home and use her experience in retail interior design, as well as her home economics and master gardener skills. It also made her the first Iowan among entrepreneurs in the U-Pick flower trend that has become more common.

She started with a 20 by 20-ft. plot of flowers and items she knitted, canned, and raised. Because it was a new idea, she

attracted a lot of publicity, and her reputation grew beyond Donahue, Iowa, to Des Moines and Chicago, 3 hrs. away.

"I've got a fantastic view from my property with rolling hills," Lafrenz says. "And I've evolved over the last 23 seasons."

The main cutting garden is now 80 by 80 ft., and woodchip paths connect multiple gardens on the 2-acre site, including a perennial bed; an English garden exploding with roses, hostas, and hydrangeas; a wildflower bed that transforms from tulips and daffodils to

larkspur to cosmos; and even a secret garden.

For \$30, customers are given clippers and a gallon milk jug with the top cut off to fill with flowers from any of the gardens—usually between 35 and 40 stems.

"My thing is you can cut from everywhere. Our goal is not to have any flowers on the farm," Lafrenz says.

But Miss Effie's is about more than just flowers. The former 200-sq. ft. shop where she once sold her homemade items has been transformed for glamping. It caters to women, complete with a bright pink portable restroom nearby.

"We just want to be a refuge, a place where you feel safe and are comfortable and might even feel loved," Lafrenz says, as you would if you're visiting your grandmother's.

Lafrenz's husband was her biggest helper and supporter. Since he died 3 years ago, she's hired two women to help run Miss Effie's. Using no-till methods, they use cardboard, leaves, mulch, compost, and soil to create and maintain all the flower beds. They don't use plastic or landscape fabric and follow mostly organic practices. Many of the annuals they plant are started in plugs by a friend.

Customers have also changed over the

years from brides gathering flowers for weddings and families coming for a day in the country to high school and college-age girls dressed up for a day out and groups coming for photo shoots. During the colder months, Lafrenz teaches small groups to make things such as jam, bread, and cheese.

At 70, she recognizes how those skills are popular again with "Cottagecore" and "Grandmillennial style" trends. Her gardens are full of easy-to-grow varieties such as zinnias and snapdragons, as well as strawflowers and statice that can be dried.

"I'm not competing with fancy. It's better working on experience and creating a relaxing place," Lafrenz says. "The most important thing a small business owner can do is share yourself."

She does that through social media and personally greeting visitors to Miss Effie's. Check the website for more information and learn more about her by subscribing to Cathylinkerlafrenz.substack.com.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Miss Effie's Country Flowers and Garden Stuff, 27387 130th Ave., Donahue, Iowa 52746 (ph 563-949-0660; cathylafrenz@gmail.com; www.misseffies.com).

Native Plants Boost Woodlot Revenue

Regional non-profit Rural Action is helping landowners in southern Ohio and surrounding states add value to their woodlands by plotting rare forest plants like ginseng to provide revenue.

"Part of our motivation is to get people out into their forests and be better stewards," says Gary Conley, director of Sustainable Forestry Program, Rural Action. "We want to show them there's so much more there than just timber to sell. We educate landowners about plants with a market value and how to cultivate, harvest, and prepare them for markets."

Plants they focus on, in addition to ginseng, include ramps, goldenseal, false unicorn, black cohosh Solomon's seal, and bloodroot. All are at-risk or rare in most woodlands.

The Forest Farmer's Handbook is a free, downloadable guide to everything from gathering seed from existing populations to locating appropriate planting sites, ground preparation, and cultivation. The organization also sells high-quality, stratified American ginseng seed and ramp bulbs. Videos on the Rural Action website review both forest plants' history, cultivation, and marketing.

Ginseng is one of the most well-known, high-value forest plants. The revenue potential has resulted in overharvesting in most areas.

"American ginseng is very popular in China, with 95 percent of harvested ginseng going to that country," says Conley. "The market can vary from \$800 to \$2,400 per dried pound. Some roots are sold based on an individual root's shape, sometimes for thousands of dollars."

That said, Ohio State University estimates it can take around 275 roots to yield a pound of dry ginseng. The time commitment is also significant, as roots should only be harvested once they've reached maturity, which can take 7 to 10 years. Federal regulation prohibits harvesting wild ginseng less than 5 years of age.

"It's important to know and understand federal and state regulations," says Conley.

Seed and leaves can be harvested earlier, at the end of each growing season. Ginseng has been known to live for 70 to 80 years.

This past year, Rural Action sold 80 lbs. of ginseng seed. If spread as recommended, that would be enough to propagate about three acres of ginseng.

"One of our goals is to take the pressure

off wild populations," says Conley.

That's also true of other plants. Like ginseng, ramps (wild onion) have been overharvested in many areas. Conley recommends planting ramps by seed or bulbs. While not anywhere as valuable as ginseng, they also don't take as long.

"Planted by bulb, ramps can be harvested in 3 to 5 years," says Conley. "Planted seed can take longer to mature."

He recommends yearly harvesting of up to 15 percent of a stand to promote and maintain it. Ramps are typically harvested for the culinary market as whole plants, partial stalks, and leaves, or just leaves. Before the entire plant is viable for harvest, one of the two leaves a bulb typically produces can be removed and marketed at the peak of harvest.

Conley keeps several patches of ramps for his use and trading with neighbors. He also digs and sells several patches of goldenseal to other forest farms. Unlike ginseng, goldenseal transplants easily. He notes that goldenseal roots have been selling for around \$40 to \$45 per pound for dried roots. However, prices appear to be as high as \$80 this year. Like ginseng and ramps, goldenseal leaves are also in demand.

Conley advises FARM SHOW readers to



Plants they focus on, in addition to ginseng, include ramps, goldenseal, false unicorn, black cohosh Solomon's seal, and bloodroot.

check with their state extension service and arborists. "Some of them are hosting workshops on forest farming," he says.

Rural Action starts taking orders for stratified ginseng seed for fall planting in August. Seed begins at \$30 for 1/4 lb. and goes to \$525 for 5 lbs. Ramp bulbs in 2024 started at \$16 for 40 bulbs and ranged to \$80 for 200 bulbs.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Rural Action, 9030 Hocking Hills Dr., The Plains, Ohio 45780 (ph 740-677-4047; info@ruralaction.org; www.ruralaction.org).



Photo courtesy of College of the Ozarks website

All students must work 15 hours a week during the academic year, plus two 40-hour weeks that pay for their tuition.

Hard Work U. Focuses On Work In Ag Programs

The College of the Ozarks, or Hard Work U. as it's become known, is a faith-based college in Point Lookout, Mo., offering many programs, including agriculture.

As Christianity is the central pillar of the school's mission, all students must take two faith-based classes in addition to their regular studies.

The agricultural program is the second-largest major, with approximately 130 students. Most live on campus in male and female dorms, although a few commute as they're married or live locally.

All students must study and work in a greenhouse, dairy farm, beef production unit, hog barn, feed mill, or meat processing plant. Four-year majors include agribusiness, agricultural development, animal science, agronomy, horticulture, and agricultural education, each leading to a Bachelor of Science degree.

The College strictly follows its Hard Work U. title. All students must work 15 hours a week during the academic year, plus two 40-hour weeks that pay for their tuition. During the summer break, students can work additional 40-hour weeks for various community businesses to pay for their upcoming room and board.

"Our goal is that our students work their way through and graduate debt-free," says Associate Professor of Agriculture Tammy

Holder. "Government loans are not allowed in our work college, although we do offer some scholarships."

Acceptance prerequisites into Hard Work U. are strict. Applicants undergo a rigorous in-person interview process. Additionally, they must have three letters of reference, with one from either a youth leader or pastor. Academic requirements are also in place.

"What sets us apart is we try to look at everything through the lens of Christ," Holder says. "But also, our farm-based work programs back up what students learn in the classroom with hands-on experience. They work the farms to ensure they know how production agriculture is done and not just the science or theory behind it. This adds true value to our program."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, College of the Ozarks (Hard Work U.), 100 Opportunity Ave., Point Lookout, Mo. 65726 (ph 800-222-0525; www.cofu.edu).