Ready to Take Root: Getting Started with Small Fruits and Hops

The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development (SMADC) and University of Maryland Extension are partnering to offer a new series of workshops on everything you need to know to grow, sell and market small fruits and hops.

The workshop series includes:

3/5 - Blueberries and Brambles
3/12 - Hops
3/19 - Strawberries
3/26 - Alternative Niche Small Fruits
4/9 - Marketing Small Fruit

You can sign up for one workshop or all 5!

The workshops will be held at the SMECO Auditorium located at 15035 Burnt Store Road Hughesville, MD 20637 from 4:30 to 8 p.m. The cost of each workshop is $15 and includes a meal and all course materials or $70 for the entire series.

For those interested in attending the workshop who reside outside the five-county area, email info@smadc.com for information about online conferencing options. If you have any further questions, please contact SMADC Staff at info@smadc.com or call 301-274-1922 ext. 1.

Register now at readytotakeroot.eventbrite.com

This workshop series is made possible in part by a Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund Grant (RMPIF) awarded to SMADC, a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland.
Tentative Agendas for each Workshop

4:30 - 8:00 p.m. (Dinner served at 4:30 p.m.)

March 5th - Brambles & Blueberries

5:00-5:20 – Industry Overview
5:20-5:40 – Site Prep, Soil Testing & Nematology
5:40-6:30 – Bramble Variety, Establishment & Trellising Method
6:40-7:20 – Blueberry Variety, Establishment & Bird Netting
7:20-8:00 – Pest Management

There is a lot of interest in brambles (blackberries and raspberries) as well as blueberries as an alternative enterprise. These small fruits have a high per acre value and are often sought after by the consumers for the nutritional benefits and fresh taste. This workshop session will begin with an overview of site preparation considerations for both blueberries and brambles including site selection, soil testing and fertility, and nematology. Next, establishment methods will be discussed including variety selection for both brambles and blueberries, planting techniques, trellising requirements and bird protection. We will round out the evening with a discussion of key pest management principles.

March 12th – Hops

5:00-5:30 – Industry Overview (Grow & Fortify)
5:30-6:10 – Site Prep, Soil Testing & Trellis Design
6:10-6:40 – Hops Variety & Establishment
6:50-7:30 – Hops Harvest & Processing
7:30-8:00 – Pest Management

The number of local breweries has expanded rapidly over the last 5 years and with it the demand for fresh, locally source hops has also increased. Hops can be grown well in our region, however they require careful management and attention to detail to be successful. This workshop will provide an industry overview to include the current status of hops production and demand situation. Next, production techniques will be discussed, including trellising requirements, site preparation, establishment methods and a review of current research on hops varieties best suited for this area. The evening will conclude with a review of hops harvest and processing methods.
March 19 – **Strawberries**

5:00-5:20 – Industry Overview
5:20-5:50 – Site Prep, Soil Testing & Soil Borne Disease
5:50-6:30 – Strawberry Variety, Establishment for Plasticulture
6:40-7:20 – Strawberry Variety, Establishment for Matted Row
7:20-8:00 – Pest Management

Strawberries lead the region in terms of both acreage and value for small fruit crops. There are two primary production methods for strawberries - the perennial matted row system and the annual plasticulture system. This workshop will discuss both systems with an emphasis upon establishment methods, site selection, variety selection and pest management.

March 26 – **Alternative & Niche Small Fruit**

5:00-5:30 – Industry Overview & Market Opportunities
5:30-6:00 – Aronia Production
6:00-6:30 – Beach Plum & Cherry Production
6:30-6:50 – Goldenberry & Ground Cherry Production
7:00-7:30 – Table Grape Production
7:30-8:00 – Figs & Hardy Kiwi Production

There are many opportunities for specialty production of niche fruit varieties in the Southern Maryland region. These species each bring unique market opportunities but require specialty production techniques. This workshop will provide an industry overview and current market situation for specialty fruit followed by a discussion of Aronia, Beachplum, Cherry, Goldenberry, Ground Cherry, and Table Grapes.

April 9 – **Marketing, Economics & Wrap Up**

5:00-5:30 – Marketing 101
5:30-6:00 – Diversified Marketing Strategies
6:00-6:30 – Online Marketing Tools
6:30-6:50 – Developing Your Marketing Plan
7:00-7:30 – Business Plan Part 1

7:30-8:00 – Business Plan Part 2

Marketing is the root of all money. Producers don’t make money when they grow a crop, they make money when they sell it. Marketing is one of the most important things a business can do. Not only does marketing build brand awareness but it can also increase sales, grow businesses and engage customers.

Workshop attendees will receive marketing information and tips targeted for each session. A final intensive marketing training session will explore developing your product’s story, identifying your “ideal customer” profile, evaluating diversified marketing strategies, maximizing promotional materials and social media, and building a sustainable brand.