



*Produced by the Non-timber Forest Products Program at Virginia Tech in collaboration with: USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, SRS-4702, Blacksburg, Virginia; Top of the Ozarks Resource Conservation & Development, Inc., Houston, Missouri; & Missouri Department of Conservation, Jefferson City, Missouri.*

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## Vines for wreaths and other products

Vines are commonly used to make wreaths, baskets and furniture. Grapevines are the most frequently used vines. Regional grapevines include fox grape (*Vitis lambrusca*); summer grape (*Vitis aestivalis*); riverbank grape (*Vitis reparis*); winter (*Vitis vulpina*); graybark grape (*Vitis cinerea*); and muscadine (*Vitis rotundifolia*). Honeysuckle, kudzu, sweet pea, and other vines are also important raw materials.

Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*) is a perennial, leguminous vine. It was introduced into the United States from Japan at the turn of the century. In 1972, the US Department of Agriculture declared kudzu to be a weed because of the vine's fast growth that destroys valuable forests by preventing trees from getting sunlight. Kudzu is commonly called mile-a-minute vine, foot-a-night vine, or the "vine that ate the South".



### Harvesting

The first step in the production of any product from the vines is the collection of the raw material. Most crafters harvest grapevine from a nearby forest or along roadsides where grapevines are often abundant. Despite their ready availability, cutting and tugging the vine out of the forest is difficult and labor intensive. Many people have found kudzu difficult to cut and bale. A suggested way is to cut it low and bale it high.

### Production

After the collection of the raw material, several different products can be made. We are focusing in this fact sheet on the production of wreaths from grapevines and products made from kudzu.



## Grapevine wreaths

Grapevine wreaths are available in varying sizes at most craft stores. However, you can collect your own if you have access to a vineyard. Cut the vines from the plant as soon as the grapes have been picked and/or before first frost. Extraction directly from the forest can also supply ample raw material. But, one must take care of the trees and other plants when harvesting.

To get you started, we have outlined the steps used in making wreaths, based on Grapevine Christmas Wreath by Makestuff.com. (Please see the electronic resources section for more information on making and decorating grapevine wreaths.)

Long lengths of the vine should be cut so that they can be wrapped into long continuous coils. The remaining leaves can be snipped while leaving the little tendrils for a nice effect on finished wreaths. The vines should be soaked in water overnight if they dry out or break while wrapping.

While coiling the vine into a wreath, begin with the thickest end of the vine and coil it into a circle that is a little smaller than the desired size of the finished wreath. One could use short pieces of wire to secure the first coil.

Twine the entire length of a piece of vine in and around itself. Once the piece of vine is finished, begin the next vine at a different

spot and wrap it in and around itself in the opposite direction. Carry on wrapping vines in this manner until the wreath is of the desired thickness. Every now and then, short lengths of wire can secure the vines together.

The vines should be wrapped rather loosely. This will leave enough room for weaving in ribbons, and adding dried flowers or other decorative articles.



Grapevine wreath decorated with dried flowers offers value-added opportunity

Wreaths can be made as circular or oval. They are also made into the shape of a heart too. Some of the tools that can be used in making wreaths are scissors, wire cutters, nose pliers and hot glue gun.

Crafting a basket is a time consuming process in which long sections of vine are repeatedly wrapped in a circular cylinder to form baskets. Wire may reinforce their

shape and increase strength. Baskets are made in a variety of styles using diverse techniques, many perfected by the indigenous Indians generations ago.



Simple style basket made from grapevine

Chairs, tables, beds, and trellises are made out of the thick (two to four inch diameter) base sections of vines. Ornamental garden products are also possible products.

## **Kudzu products**

For many years, the rubber-like nature of kudzu vines has been used by basket makers for their utility and decorative functions. We came across the name of Ruth Duncan of Greenville, Alabama who makes over 200 kudzu baskets each year and says she does not mind that people call her the "Queen of Kudzu."

Regina Hines of Ball Ground, Georgia weaves baskets of unique styles which incorporate curled kudzu vines. Though she weaves baskets using other vines also, she finds kudzu vines the most versatile.

Other products are made from kudzu, including kudzu blossom jelly and syrup, and paper. You can also cook many tasty dishes such as deep-fried kudzu leaves and kudzu quiche. See the Amazing Story of Kudzu in the electronic resources for more information about the two above mentioned basket weavers and many more interesting readings about kudzu.

Kudzu vines can be used to produce baskets, wreaths, furniture, and cloth products. The key to financially successful use of kudzu lies in integrating all its by-products. A potentially valuable material is the root starch for medicinal and food markets. But fodder (leaves, roots, vines), fiber (vines and root), chlorophyll (leaves) and tannin (roots and vines) could also supplement income.

Kudzu is ideal for control of soil erosion problems including coverage of mine spoils and denuded areas that will not support other plants.

The forest industry and U.S. Forest Service would support its removal because it invades whole forests, climbing saplings and even 100 foot tall trees, smothering them by cutting off necessary sunlight with its dense foliage. Moreover, kudzu can prevent establishment of new forests by completely covering the ground.



## Marketing

Crafters sell their product both plain and decorated. Plain products are sold to craft shops, or florists, and gift stores which then decorate them for sale. Wreaths and baskets are decorated with dried or synthetic flowers, ribbons, or other ornaments. They are sold to florists, gift stores or at festivals and craft shows.

These products are usually marketed by word of mouth, shop location, and local and regional craft shows and festivals. With the Internet, many wreath makers and basket makers are gaining increased exposure and markets for their products. Although marketing on the Internet may not be for everyone, we have included below several Internet-based marketing examples.



## Electronic resources

*(The following are the websites of some sellers of grape vine wreaths. Many of them sell many more articles than just wreaths made with these vines)*

Gifts from Mother Nature (These include gifts made from natural products)  
<http://www.giftsfrommothernature.com/GVWreaths.htm>

Vine and things  
<http://www.vinesnthings.com/catalog.htm>

Pyraphernalia

<http://www.bigtalk9.com/gifts/miscgifts/wreaths.html>

Accents

<http://www.accentsfloral.com/prod02.htm>

Mrs. E's Collectables

<http://mrscollectables.virtualave.net/Wreaths.htm>

Cedar Tree Craft Supply

<http://www.thecedartreecrafts.com/naturals/natural2.html>

White's Concrete & Pottery Basket Department

<http://www.whitesconcrete.com/Wicker/misc.wicker.htm>

Freshly Preserved Flower Company

<http://www.freshlypreserved.com/grapvinwreath.htm>

Grapevine Christmas Wreath by Makestuff.com

[http://www.makestuff.com/xmas\\_wreaths.html](http://www.makestuff.com/xmas_wreaths.html)

The Amazing Story of Kudzu includes information on kudzu in general.

<http://www.alabamatv.org/kudzu/default.htm>

Krazy Kudzu Products, Ltd. Website describes several products made from kudzu  
<http://www.krazykudzu.com/basket.htm>

The following website lists many Basketry Associations & Guilds in the country  
<http://www.ulster.net/~abeebe/basgld.html>

The following website is a directory of US  
basketry guilds and associations  
<http://www.weavenet.com/guilds.htm>

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*This is part of a series of fact sheets on non-timber forest products. The full set of fact sheets is available at the  
Non-timber Forest Products website: <http://www.sfp.forprod.vt.edu/>*

*Please give us your comments on this fact sheet and suggestions for future fact sheets. Direct your comments  
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