

Interreg



Co-funded by
the European Union

Romania – Bulgaria

The project "Development of eco-friendly crops in the Giurgiu-Ruse region" (ECOCROPS) is co-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund, within the Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

NICHE PLANTS. SMALL CROPS, HIGH VALUE.



Project partners: Employers' Association Regional Center for Urban Entrepreneurship ("CRAU") South Muntenia Region (Leader), Slivo Pole Municipality, Ruse, Bulgaria (Partner 2), "Udriște Năsturel" High School, Hotarele commune, Giurgiu county (Partner 3)

WHAT ARE NICHE PLANTS

Medicinal, aromatic plants, fruit bushes and pseudo-cereals grown on small areas, under certain soil, climate or habitat conditions are considered niche plants.

Here are some examples suitable for cultivation in the Giurgiu-Ruse region:

- **Medicinal plants:** lavender, marigold, chamomile, milk thistle, marjoram, thyme, mint
- **Fruit bushes:** aronia, goji, sea buckthorn, blackberry, blueberry, raspberry
- **Pseudo-cereals:** quinoa, millet, buckwheat

Remember

Cultivating niche crops starts with well-prepared soils for a rich and healthy harvest. The first step before establishing a crop is to analyze the soil. Check the physical, chemical and biological properties of the land to know which plants are suitable, but also to manage the quality of the soil.



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Niche crops bring economic value and support sustainable agriculture. Choosing them means more fertile land, safer production and a more balanced environment.

They are adaptable to climate change and are resistant, especially to drought and desertification.

They improve soil quality, preventing erosion and enriching it with nutrients. Legumes fix nitrogen in the soil, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers.

They reduce water consumption in agriculture, having deep roots that extract moisture from the soil better than conventional crops. These crops are ideal for areas with low rainfall.

They attract pollinators, support biodiversity, beneficial for the rich fruiting of trees and for increasing fruit production.

They are natural repellents for pests, protecting both the large crop and the orchards.

They increase faunal diversity, attract birds and predatory insects, which help in the natural control of pests, maintaining the ecological balance of the agricultural ecosystem.

They maintain soil health, by introducing them into rotation, also reducing the risk of diseases and pests specific to monoculture or short rotations.



BENEFITS FOR AGRICULTURE

Support sustainable agriculture.

Revitalize the soil, some can be established on abandoned, degraded or pesticide-polluted land.

Use soil nutrients and water that other crops do not have access to.

Reduce economic risks, by reducing dependence on agricultural market fluctuations and climate change.

Have lower costs and greater efficiency.

Create habitats for beneficial microorganisms and useful fauna.

BENEFITS FOR COMMUNITIES

Opportunity to increase agricultural sustainability, improve the socio-economic environment and the rural landscape.

Benefits for human health, a balanced diet and a cleaner environment.

Lavender, marigolds, roses generate **opportunities for agritourism.**

Higher profit on small areas, with premium, ecological and sustainable products.

Reduced competition, opportunities on local and international markets, customers looking for unique and sustainable products.

Supports income diversification and economic development, by processing products in the form of oils, teas, cosmetics or medicinal products.

NICHE CROPS, STEP BY STEP

Soil analysis

Check the physical, chemical and biological properties of the land to know which plants are suitable, but also to manage the quality of the soil.

Agricultural works

Before planting

- *Cleaning and loosening*
Remove weeds and work the soil for optimal aeration.
- *Organic fertilization*
Compost or manure provide essential nutrients.
- *Irrigation planning*
An efficient water source is the key to harmonious development.

Plant selection and planting

Choose what to grow based on soil analysis, your resources, market, profitability and processing possibilities, as well as sustainability. Niche plants are known to enrich the soil and support biodiversity, attracting pollinators. The cultivation of these plants is also supported by funds for sustainable agriculture.

Culture maintenance

In general, niche crops are distinguished by their easy maintenance, being resistant to drought and pests, even being protectors against pests for other plants grown around them. However, for maintenance, some plants such as lavender or fruit bushes need regular pruning, others - fertilization or irrigation.

Harvesting

To obtain the best quality products, follow the evolution of the plant and choose the right time for harvesting.



VALORISATION

- *Learn about the market*

Some plants have high market demand, but are grown by fewer farmers, you can benefit from growing these plants by ensuring sales and a better price. Also, plants from organic crops are increasingly sought after by those interested in sustainability.

- *Choose to process, not just sell raw products*

Processed products have a higher added value. Marmalades, compotes, jams, syrups, oils, teas, spices and others can be sold at higher prices, are much less perishable and can attract a wider audience.



- *Partnerships with retailers and distributors*

From shops in the area or near local tourist attractions, to partnerships with organic stores, natural pharmacies or premium restaurants to online sales, there are distribution strategies that help you become visible and sell to a wider audience.

- *Branding and marketing*

Create your own brand for your products, promote them online and participate in fairs, conferences and workshops to increase their notoriety and to permanently expand your network of contacts. By promoting sustainability and biodiversity through your products, through certifications and eco-labels, you can have the chance of better exploitation.



DID YOU KNOW ...

Quinoa is a complete food, included by NASA in the astronauts' diet.

Sea buckthorn contains 10 times more vitamin C than an orange. Sea buckthorn fruits can withstand temperatures down to -40°C .

Aronia and goji are nicknamed "the fruits of longevity" because they reduce oxidative stress and improve heart health.

Millet is the "ancestor of polenta", the spring cereal, cultivated since ancient times that has now been replaced by corn.

Amaranth was considered the "food of the gods" by the Aztecs. It contains more protein than most cereals.

Lavender is very drought-resistant. It is a magnet for bees and butterflies, supporting biodiversity. Its aroma combats insomnia and stress.

Blueberries have a high content of antioxidants, protect cells against aging, improve memory and cognitive functions, support vision, reducing eye fatigue.



NOTES



Project title: Project "Development of eco-friendly crops in the Giurgiu-Ruse region" (ECOCROPS)

Publisher: Employers' Association Regional Center for Urban Entrepreneurship ("CRAU") South-Muntenia Region

Publication date: April 23, 2025

The content of this material does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Union.

Contact us for support.
Giurgiu County, Blvd. București, no. 86A
(+40) 766 250 308
ecocrops@eco-rural.ro
<https://efort.eco-rural.ro/eco-crops/>

