

# NON-WOOD PRODUCTS

## OVERVIEW

Until relatively recently, forests were mainly viewed in the context of the quantity of wood produced. However, today forests are seen more as multifunctional, sometimes with a higher value placed on the non-wood elements. This is particularly true for certain parts of the world where there are strong forestry traditions and where the practices of utilising the non-wood products from the forests have long been practiced; for example, the Scandinavian countries where the practice of collecting fruits, berries and fungi is well established and citizens have traditional rights to collect these products from the forests.

In Ireland the opportunities created by our forests for amenity, recreation and nature are among the main criteria by which most people judge the value and benefits of the national forestry development programme. There is a substantial and growing interest by the public generally and a by a wide variety of interest groups in the use of forests for many different activities including recreation, education and general well-being. Economic growth, development of efficient transportation networks, and increasing disposable incomes have led to a dramatic increase in demands for open space and the recreation associated with forested land. However, there are other products of value in the forests such as foliage, fruit, fungi and berries and these may also have an important economic value for the forest owner.

Ireland's forests are predominantly plantations, mainly grown for wood. However, they are also providers of many other goods and services. As the country becomes more urbanised, the significance of these services is likely to continue to grow. With the expansion of farm forestry, the need to develop income sources from these forests are of the highest priority and developing the full potential of the other products apart from wood production is paramount.

In 2004 COFORD carried out a review of the market possibilities for non-wood forest products in Ireland and explored the opportunity of creating markets for some of these non-wood goods and services. While the non-wood sector in Ireland is not developed to the same extent as in other countries, there are areas such as the production of Christmas trees and foliage that are now important economic activities. Forest recreation and other outdoor activities are steadily growing in our forests and are promoted by the following COFORD projects that are contributing to the development of the non-wood forest products sector in Ireland.

- **FARMFUNGI** - Production of edible fungi in the farm forest.
- **FORESTFUNGI** – An assessment of wild edible fungal production in selected forest sites, and an evaluation of the commercial potential of harvesting.
- **WILDFUNGI** in Ireland – A publication exploring the range of species of fungi recorded in Irish forests.