



## Using NRCS Technical and Financial Assistance to Establish Elderberries

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The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency of the US Department of Agriculture that is responsible for assisting landowners to improve our soil, water, air, plants, wildlife and energy use. Ensuring productive lands in harmony with a healthy environment is the vision of NRCS. Establishing elderberries on private land and managing elderberries for aesthetic benefit, wildlife benefit, production benefit, or a combination of all three uses is consistent with NRCS goals and vision.

NRCS provides assistance to landowners in the form of Conservation Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance. Conservation Technical Assistance is the help that NRCS and its partners provide to private landowners to address opportunities, concerns and problems related to the use of natural resources and to help landowners make sound natural resource management decisions on private, tribal and other non-federal lands. Conservation Technical Assistance is voluntary and free. One of the most beneficial outcomes of participating with NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance is the development of a Conservation Plan specific to each landowner's property and goals. A conservation plan provides the landowner with a comprehensive overview of their land and identifies potential conservation practices and activities on the landscape that



meet the landowner's goals and objectives. The Conservation Plan includes natural resource information, a record of decisions, and a schedule of events or operations. Conservation Plans are meant to be site specific, comprehensive and action oriented to result in improvement in resource management according to the landowner goals. In addition to developing a conservation plan, Conservation Technical Assistance can also be used to assess resources, design practices, monitor resources, or follow up after conservation practices are installed. NRCS in Missouri has 100 field offices servicing all 114 counties staffed with certified conservation planners. The first step in receiving Conservation Technical Assistance is to locate the county USDA Service Center and make an appointment with a conservation planner. To locate the nearest USDA Service Center go to: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.





If the landowner chooses, Conservation Technical Assistance and conservation planning serves as a springboard for those interested in participating in USDA financial assistance programs. NRCS has many financial assistance programs; however, the most common and probably most applicable to elderberry planting is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). EQIP and WHIP are both environmental improvement programs that provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and opportunities. Financial assistance is awarded to the producer for implementing conservation practices in accordance with established conservation standards established for each practice. Some examples of conservation practices where planting of elderberries may meet the conservation goals are:

- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
- Alley Cropping
- Silvopasture
- Forest Farming
- Riparian Forest Buffers
- Windbreaks
- Multi Story Cropping
- Cover Crop.

The conservation practices mentioned above may be utilized individually or in combination in different parts of the landscape depending on the landowner's goals and are addressed in the conservation plan. For example, the landowner can utilize elderberries as part of a windbreak establishment around the homestead area of the property. In addition, the conservation plan may identify sloping ground on the property where elderberries can be established in rows on a contour where another crop may be planted in between to create an alley cropping situation for enhanced income potential while protecting the soil from erosion. Elderberries may also be established in a box type planting using Tree/Shrub establishment to maximize production in an area while also providing a permanent cover on the landscape. In these situations cover crops may be beneficial to utilize between the rows of elderberries to reduce erosion, suppress weeds and improve soil quality. If the landowner is also concerned about wildlife habitat improvement on the farm, elderberries can be included in a riparian forest buffer planting along a creek to enhance wildlife and provide protection in a fragile riparian area. Landowners who are producing and managing their land organically according to USDA National Organic Program may be interested in financial assistance available through a special initiative within EQIP specifically targeted for organic producers.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is also a financial assistance program, but instead of providing payments to producer for the installation of a specific conservation practice, producers are paid an annual payment for the operation level environmental benefits they produce. Under CSP, participants are paid for conservation performance; the higher the operational performance, the higher their payment. Under CSP, producers can improve their conservation performance by adopting enhancements.

Enhancements are a type of conservation activity used to treat natural resources and improve conservation performance.

Some examples of enhancements that may relate to the planting or management of elderberries include:

- Extending Riparian Forest Buffers for Water Quality Protection and Wildlife Habitat
- Forest Stand Improvement for Habitat and Soil Quality
- Multi Story Cropping Sustainable Management of Non Timber Forest Plants
- Renovation of Windbreak or Shelter Belt for Wildlife Habitat, and potentially others.

Landowners interested in establishing elderberries on their property have many resources at their disposal through the NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance opportunities. Establishing elderberries on private land and managing elderberries for aesthetic benefit, wildlife benefit, production benefit, or a combination of all three uses is consistent with NRCS goals and vision. For more information contact the local USDA Service Center to make an appointment to work with an NRCS certified conservation planner. In addition, resources are available online to learn more about NRCS and financial assistance opportunities.



*Recommended Website:*

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/home>  
EQIP, WHIP, and CSP Websites are available from this link.

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