

The Essentialist

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Bigfork's Essential Stuff Newsletter -- Bringing People Together
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Garden Hoops from Natural Materials

In our video: [Root Cellars, Gardens & Greenhouses Slideshow](#), we included an idea from Jeffrey Funk's garden that deserves more exploration: natural twig hoops to support garden covers.

The photo, right, is of my lilac hoops with a floating cover, amidst the PVC hoops that I had originally placed, until inspired by Jeffrey's idea.

In light of the toxicity of PVC that is typically used for garden hoops, and also considering the high cost of energy required to produce PVC, we'd like to encourage gardeners to use natural hoops. The following is from Jeffrey:



*Floating row cover
over lilac hoops*



Serviceberry hoops

“It is a bit curious that gardeners are so programmed as to buy PVC pipe or steel rods to do what can be done easily, at no cost, and more beautifully with wood.

We used serviceberry stems, which are abundant in the woods around my place. ... They are quite strong, available in a variety of diameters in the lengths required, and cutting a number of them from a cluster does not kill the parent plant. In fact, it may make the parent more vigorous in a shady location.

They will last several seasons at least. ... The hoops, which are stuck into the ground, would be best stored under cover for the winter to prevent rot on the tips that were below grade.

Chokecherry works well, too, if you can find it in the right form. There is plenty of that around here too.

We use these hoops to support either plain old lumber tarps salvaged from Sliters to prevent freeze damage overnight, or garden fabric which must be purchased new. That [latter] fabric allows light to penetrate, as well as some, but not all rain, and provides protection from light frosts, insects and birds.”

As you can see from the photo of his hoops, they are placed about 12” apart; mine were placed about 18” apart. This spacing is less than is typical for PVC hoops.

Jeffrey adds that they also used serviceberry stems to weave the weft of their woven fence, pictured here, woven into the gate. He expects these to last at least ten years, since they are not stuck in the ground.

Serviceberries

Not familiar with serviceberry? The scientific name is Amelanchier. A native plant that grows abundantly in our area, they are sometimes called June berries or Saskatoons.



Serviceberry fruit

Some people think of them as weeds, but they are an important native food. They make excellent pies, similar to (and some say better than) huckleberries.

They can grow quite tall for a shrub, providing excellent long stems for hoops. Their spring blooms are white, then produce small dark red fruit in mid-summer.



Serviceberry stems woven through gate



Serviceberry blossom

Credits

Jeffrey Funk, Bigfork MT

Photos:

Floating row cover over lilac hoops by Catherine Haug

Serviceberry hoops; Serviceberry stems woven through gate by Edd Blackler

Serviceberry fruit from Oregon State Univ. Extension, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu>

Serviceberry blossom by source unknown