

## Project Branch Out

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The mission of Project Branch Out is to propagate rare and native flora of Western North Carolina and provide educational opportunities for local students, growers and plant enthusiasts. The driving force behind the creation of Project Branch Out is to help farmers create a cash crop that serves as an alternative to raising tobacco or Christmas trees.

The EnergyXchange greenhouse facilities at the Yancey campus include four greenhouses (30 x 98 feet) and seven cold frames (14 x 96 feet). Inside, we tackle the challenging task of growing native flowering shrubs of the Appalachians—beginning from seed harvested by staff and volunteers in the fall.

Through seed propagation, varieties of native deciduous azaleas are being reintroduced to regional nurseries. These seed propagated azaleas and other rhododendrons are utilized by the local Nurserymen as transplant stock for their fields. Producing plants from seed is a sustainable process that does not harm the parent plant or its environment. These native ornamentals are part of the natural beauty and cultural heritage that draws thousands of visitors to our region annually.

The Appalachian Mountains offer an unequalled array of native ornamentals. By setting an example, our greenhouse operations are attempting to change the propagation method of local nurserymen and protect the natural populations of the diverse native flora. We offer students the opportunity to learn greenhouse management and have become a source of healthy, high quality plants for landscapers and growers in the region.

Located on the campus of EnergyXchange in rural Burnsville, NC, Project Branch Out is a collaborative endeavor, developed through the assistance of such organizations as Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development Council, Mayland Community College Horticulture Department, and the NC Cooperative Extension Service.



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