

Organic Forest Farming

A Recordkeeping Checklist



Your Land & Its History



- Draw or print a map of your forest areas: label each section, note the size, nearby roads, water sources, and adjacent land uses.
- Write down what has been done on each forest area over the past 3 years, including any sprays, fertilizers, or other materials applied. (This is required before your first organic harvest.)
- Be able to demonstrate that no prohibited chemicals (pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, etc.) were used on your land for at least 3 years prior to harvest.
- If your land borders farms or roads, note the buffer you have to prevent spray drift or chemical runoff from reaching your forest.
- If you rent or lease the land (or only the tapping rights), get a written agreement confirming that the landowner also adheres to organic rules year-round.
- If you are adding new forest areas, update your map and obtain a 3-year history for that land before harvesting.
- If you borrow or share equipment, keep a note of when you cleaned it out to avoid contamination from non-organic operations.

Seeds, Starts & Planting Materials

- Keep receipts and supplier info for everything you plant: seeds, bulbs, spawn, spores, or transplants. Note whether each came from an organic source and obtain your certifier's approval before using non-organic material.
- For mushrooms: keep your spawn supplier's organic certificate. If organic spawn isn't available, document that you checked and obtain certifier approval (new federal rules take effect March 2027).
- Write down the common and scientific names of everything you grow. Your certifier will want to know exactly which species you're working with.

Mushroom Growing



- For log-grown mushrooms: note the wood species used, when and where the logs were cut, and confirm the trees weren't treated with chemicals in the past 3 years.
- Record each inoculation: date, log batch, spawn type and strain, how you inoculated, and where the logs are laid.
- Track your harvests: first flush date, harvest dates, how much you picked, and which log batch it came from
- Write down any cleaning products you use and confirm they're approved for organic use.
- Keep notes on spent logs: how you compost them (compost piles need to reach 131 degrees F for at least 3 days), and what you do with the finished compost.
- Test your water source for E. coli at least twice a year and keep the results on file.

Medicinal Herbs & Sensitive Plants

- Keep planting and growing records for all sensitive species.
- Check your state's rules for ginseng permits and harvesting regulations. New York and Vermont allow harvest with permits; Connecticut prohibits the export of wild ginseng. Keep your permits on file.
- Record your rotating harvest plan, so you can demonstrate that you are not over-picking the same patches.

Ramps, Fiddleheads & Other Wild Edibles

- Sketch or map where your ramp patches and fiddlehead stands are, and note roughly how large each one is.
- Each time you harvest, write down the date, which patch you picked from, and how much you took. Harvesting must not exceed the regenerative capacity of wild species.
- Make sure each harvest area has a clean 3-year land history showing no prohibited sprays or chemicals.

Pests, Weeds & Disease



- Write out your basic approach to dealing with pests, disease, and wildlife pressure.
- When you spot a problem, write down the date, location, what you saw, and what you did about it.
- If you apply any product (even an approved one), record the product name, what's in it, where and when you applied it, and how much you used. If you need to use a restricted input, check with your certifier first.
- For invasive plants: note what you found and how you removed it.

Harvesting & Handling



- Each time you harvest, write down: what you picked, where it came from, how much, the date, and who harvested it.
- Give each batch a simple lot number so you can trace it back to the specific patch and harvest date.
- Keep notes on what happens after harvest: how you cleaned, dried, or stored the product, and what containers or packaging you used (no prohibited sanitizers or preservatives).
- If you handle any non-organic products too, keep records showing that your organic products are always kept separate.
- If you dry, blend, or process your products into something else (tinctures, dried mushrooms, maple sugar, etc.), you'll likely need a separate handling certification. Check with your certifier and document all ingredients.

Sales & Keeping Track



- Keep a sales record for everything you sell: product, quantity, price, buyer name and address, date, and that it's labeled as organic.
- Be able to trace any product back to the patch it came from. Inspectors may ask you to show the full path from the forest to the sale.
- Do a simple check each year: does the amount you harvested match what you sold, kept, or used? This is called a mass balance, and it's part of your inspection.
- For wholesale buyers: ask for their organic certificate or buyer verification and keep it on file.
- Hold onto all sales records for at least 5 years.

Annual Certification & Inspection

- Update your Organic System Plan each year and send it to your certifier before the deadline. Mention any new areas, crops, or changes to your processes.
- Pull all your records together before your annual inspection: land histories, receipts, harvest logs, sales records, and maps.
- Keep organic and non-organic products clearly separated at all times. Label everything.
- Hold onto all records for at least 5 years and make them available to your certifier if asked.
- If you also farm non-organic land, keep clear records showing your organic forest areas are separate and protected from contamination.

This checklist serves as an organic certification record keeping reference. Use it to stay organized throughout the year and prepared for inspections. You may not need every record listed—focus on those that reflect your operation's activities. Consult the current version of 7 CFR Part 205 at [ecfr.gov](https://www.ecfr.gov) and your Accredited Certification Agency (ACA) to understand which records are necessary for your ACA and inspector to fully understand your operation. This document does not substitute for legal advice or official regulatory guidance.

