The culinary oils listed in a recent natural foods catalog include—in addition to olive oil—sesame, safflower, sunflower, grape seed, canola, apricot kernel, coconut, hazelnut, peanut, pumpkin, and walnut oils. Advertisements for these culinary oils tout their health benefits and unique flavors. Some of these plant-derived oils can be used to make soap, body and hair oils, detergents, and paints. Some can also be used to make industrial lubricants. A wide range of oilseeds and other oil producing plants are high quality feedstocks for biodiesel. Oilseed processing expands the use of crops such as sunflowers and brings value to grape seeds, which are usually waste products.

Farmers and small-business owners are asking whether it is possible and profitable to add value to their seeds and nuts by extracting the oil. This is not an easy question to answer because there are so many variables, some of which are noted in the first section of this publication.

Most oil processing in the U.S. is done on a large industrial scale, and the processes use proprietary information. Small-scale oil extraction is more commonplace in other parts of the world; thus many of the useful resource materials and much of the appropriate-scale machinery come from other countries. This publication describes the basic process, with additional details on producing oil from sunflower seeds and sources for additional information.

**Getting Started**

Consultant E. Peter Matthies has been involved with pressing oil from seeds and nuts for more than a decade. Matthies now lives in Germany but makes frequent trips to the U.S. Matthies notes that every circumstance requires a different approach. He suggests asking yourself the following questions.

- Why do I want to get into oil processing? Will it be a hobby or a new economic enterprise?
- How big will the operation be?
- How many different products will be made, including both oil and
the press cake left after the oil has been pressed out of the raw seeds or nuts?

- Do I want to target mass markets or specialty markets?
- What geographical area do I want to cover?

Matthies described how he got into this new “oil business” after retiring from the petroleum business.

“Upon my retirement I started to ranch/raise cattle in Western Colorado. A professor at Colorado State University suggested that I plant alfalfa and rotate it with canola rather than other small grains. With a press I would get some oil and the by-product (press cake) would also have economic value.

When I found the special “cold press” equipment in Germany I purchased a couple of presses and got started. I learned from the equipment company representatives about other oils from hazelnuts, peanuts, walnuts, macadamia nuts, to sesame, sunflower, hemp, Saw Palmetto, and others and started to make oils. I also tried some very special oils, like coffee oil and oil from dried orange peels. I went to some of the big shows and met marketing and distributing people. I furnished them with samples and received substantial orders. I shipped anywhere from one gallon containers to 55 gallon drums. A local cattle feed lot sent their truck twice a month to pick up any press cake that I didn’t use for my own horses and cattle.

Slowly my name became known by word-of-mouth. People sent me different seeds or nuts to test for oil content and for the taste and value of such oils. Through a Web page I attracted universities and other companies.

Some people who bought the special Komet presses from me concentrated on special markets, such as hemp seed oil in Canada, or grape seed oils from wineries, or certain immigrant groups who like special oils they were used to from their home country.

Later I became known for the special quality of the truly cold pressed oil (less than 90° F) and I was asked to test various varieties of certain products, such as grape seed oil from different grapes, like an oil ‘a la Merlot’ or ‘a la Pinot Noir.’ I produced oil on contract for several companies until they had established their own markets, at which point they acquired their own production plants.

Small scale operators, who consider oils as a sideline, might be able to sell to local shops and restaurants. Health spas are always in need of special oils. Make sure you have a good name for your product and present the oils in appealing containers.

In regard to pricing, find out what other people charge and see if you can live with that. Or concentrate on high price markets like certified organic stores or Kosher. Prices for the same oil are different in different parts of the country. Can you be competitive at those rates? Can you sell just under those rates and still be economical? Certified organic and Kosher cost extra for inspection in addition to the installation and operation of the plant. Is the market large enough to pay for the higher costs?

I believe there is no sure fire way in all parts of the country. But one thing is necessary wherever you are: You’ve got to go out and toot your horn!” (Matthies, 2004)

Note that Matthies mentions contract processing as a way to get started without setting up your own processing facility. Badger Oil in Spooner, Wisconsin, is one company that will do this, and also provide consulting services if you decide to invest in your own plant. Contact information is in Further Resources.

Basic Processing Steps

Raw Material Preparation

Preparation of the raw material often includes removing husks or seed coats from the seeds and separating the seeds from the chaff. Information about seed cleaners designed for small-scale operations is often
available from agricultural research stations doing small plot research with various crops. For instance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) researchers working with flax in North Dakota buy some of their equipment from Seedburo, which will supply a catalog upon request. Almaco is another company that specializes in equipment for research, such as one- and two-row test plot combines and various types of stationary threshers. See Further Resources for contact information and additional sources of equipment.

Extraction

Oil can be extracted mechanically with an oil press, an expeller, or even with a wooden mortar and pestle—a traditional method that originated in India. Presses range from small, hand-driven models that an individual can build to power-driven commercial presses. Expellers have a rotating screw inside a horizontal cylinder that is capped at one end. The screw forces the seeds or nuts through the cylinder, gradually increasing the pressure. The material is heated by friction and/or electric heaters. The oil escapes from the cylinder through small holes or slots, and the press cake emerges from the end of the cylinder, once the cap is removed. Both the pressure and temperature can be adjusted for different kinds of feedstock. The ram press uses a piston inside a cage to crush the seed and force out the oil.

Oils can also be extracted with solvents, but solvent extraction is a complex operation. The Intermediate Technology Development Group Technical Brief, Principles of Oil Extraction, describes several methods of extraction. It cautions that “solvent extraction is not suitable for small-scale processing because of high capital and operating costs, the risk of fire and explosions from solvents, and the complexity of the operation.” Waste management of solvents such as hexane is a problem as well.

Clarification

Clarification removes contaminants, such as fine pulp, water, and resins. You can clarify oil by allowing it to stand undisturbed for a few days and then removing the upper layer. If it needs further clarification, filter the oil through a fine filter cloth. Finally, you can heat the oil to drive off traces of water and destroy any bacteria. Having a very clean oil is very important in all uses, including biodiesel.

Package and Storage

Use clean, dry containers to package and store oils and help prevent rancidity. Sealed glass or plastic bottles are adequate. Colored containers in a dark box help to increase shelf life. The shelf life of oil is usually 6 to 12 months, if it is properly packaged and kept away from heat and sunlight. (Fellows and Hampton, 1992)

Adding Value Adds Costs

Although value-added processing can be a way to increase a farmer’s share of the farm product dollar, adding value doesn’t come free. At each step, the farmer is adding more work, buying additional equipment and supplies, and using more energy. For example, an automated Chinese oil press costs $5,000 and a Swedish Taby Press scaled for on-farm use is $9,000, based on prices quoted in 2006. (Derr and Grubinger). Information needs increase. Wholesaling or retailing culinary oil will require nutritional labeling. And depending upon the situation, liability insurance may become a must.

A key point to remember is that adding value to any foods by processing increases safety risks, due to the increased handling. Therefore, rules and regulations are established by each state to protect the public health. In addition, the FDA regulates products going out of state. Farmers considering processed foods as a value-added business should contact their state health department before proceeding.

Oil can be extracted mechanically with an oil press, an expeller, or even with a wooden mortar and pestle—a traditional method that originated in India.
Sunflower Seed Oil Using the Ram Press

Enterprise Works Worldwide (EWW—for-merly Appropriate Technology International) has supported a number of projects in Africa that process oilseeds using the ram press. (See Further Resources for contact information.) The presses weigh about 45 pounds and can process 100 to 120 pounds of sunflower seeds per day. The extraction rate is 20 to 25 percent using the softer-shelled, high-oil-content sunflower varieties. The ram press can also be used for sesame, mustard, safflower seeds, and peanuts. Details on the use of the press are given in EWW’s manual Using and Maintaining the Ram Press. The information on pressing sunflower seed that follows is from that manual. (Herz, 1997)

Choose seed that has a soft shell and high oil content (40–45 percent oil). Most high-oil-content sunflower seeds are all black. Many striped seeds have little oil. To get some idea of how the seed will work in the press, try to crack it open with your fingers. This will not be difficult with soft seed. With hard seed, you may need to use your teeth. Now look at the kernel inside the shell. It should fill the shell completely. If the seed is much smaller than the inside of the shell, it was probably harvested too early. You will not get much oil from it.

Put the kernel (without the shell) between your two thumbnails and squeeze. Did the kernel fall apart? Are there little smudges of oil on your thumbnails? If not, there may not be much oil in the kernel. (This is a very rough way of assessing seed. The manual also presents a more precise way to determine the percent of oil, but still encourages the practice of checking seeds with your fingers.) Check the different batches of seed you come across. In time you will get a feel for the differences.

For successful pressing, the seed must be:

- **Dry.** Moist seed will lead to low yields and clog the cage (a part of the press). Moist seed may also get moldy.
- **Clean.** Fine dust in the seed may clog the cage. Chaff left in the seed will absorb some of the oil and keep it from getting squeezed out of the cage. Sand in the seed will wear the press out. Stones badly damage the piston.
- **Warm.** Warm seed will yield the most oil for the least effort.
- **Dried before it is bagged and stored.** Very damp seed will feel humid when you bury your hand in it, especially if the seed is warm. If you heat your seed in the sun under a sheet of clear plastic, you may see moisture collecting beneath the plastic if the seed is too wet.

Seed that is slightly too damp may feel dry but will not press well. If it is too damp, but not yet moldy, it can be dried in the sun. (Never press moldy seed. It is not safe for human consumption.) Spread the seed out thinly on the ground, on plastic, or on roofing tin. At the end of the day, pile the seed up to keep it from absorbing moisture in the cool night air, and spread it out again in the morning. If there is any chance of rain, or if the morning dew is heavy, you will need to bag all the seed in the evening and put it back out the following morning. After two or more sunny days, the husks will be dry. Now bag the seed and store it for a week. In that time, the moisture in the seed will
be drawn into the dry husk, and the entire seed will become evenly dry.

Winnowing is a low-cost way to clean the seed. On a day when there is a steady breeze, spread a cloth on the ground. Drop the seeds from a container to the cloth. The chaff and dirt will blow away. The seeds will collect on the cloth. Any stones must be picked out by hand.

If the sun is shining, the seed can be heated on a piece of roofing tin or some black plastic. Spread the seed thinly and evenly on the sheet. On a sunny day, it will be hot to the touch in 15 minutes. The seed should be at least 104°F, which is pleasantly warm to the touch. The yield will improve as the seed gets hotter, all the way up to 150°F, uncomfortably hot to the touch. The seed will heat faster on a black surface than on a light-colored surface. Some people also cover the seed with a sheet of clear plastic. This helps to hold heat in and make the seed hotter.

If the sun is not shining, you can also heat the seeds on a stove. Put the seeds in a shallow pan over low heat for five minutes. You will need to stir the seeds often and be careful not to scorch them. Charred seeds will give the oil a bad taste.

You can use a double boiler to make sure that the seeds do not burn. You will need two pots, one large and one smaller. Set the larger pot on the heat, with enough water to keep it from boiling dry. Set the smaller pot inside the big pot. The bottom of the small pot does not need to touch the water below. Put the seed in the smaller pot, stir it occasionally, and the steam from the boiling water will heat the seed without burning it. The seed should be ready in 15 minutes.

The boiler works best if the smaller pot is almost the same size as the big pot. Then there is not too much room for the steam to escape from between them. This method does not require as much attention and stirring, and you will not spoil any seed from accidental charring, but it uses more fuel.

The seed is now ready to be pressed. The pressing operation is described in detail in the manual, complete with diagrams. Rita Laker-Ojok, a former EWW staffer who worked in Africa, cautions that knowing how to use the press is important, especially regarding pressure adjustments. Correct adjustment allows the “cake,” or meal, to come out; too much pressure may cause a jam. (Laker-Ojok, 2000)

According to Laker-Ojok, the sunflower oil produced is very high quality. It can be further processed, or clarified, in one of three ways. The simplest is to let it settle for a week. The oil can also be mixed with a little water and salt and boiled for 10 minutes. This changes the taste slightly. Or the oil can be filtered through paper or cloth.

**Seed Cake or Meal—Valuable By-product**

Seed cake is a valuable by-product of pressing. Sesame seed cake is valuable as a human food. Sunflower seed cake is not suitable for people, but it makes a good addition to chicken, pig, or cattle feed. Since sunflower seed cake has all the seed hulls in it, it is very fibrous. The ram press does not get all the oil out of the cake; it is oilier than most feed additives. It is quite high in crude protein, but contains very few carbohydrates. It should be used as a feed additive, not a feed by itself. The EWW manual describes feed rations for commercial broiler chickens, cows, and pigs that include sunflower seed cake.

Proper storage of both seed and seed cake is extremely important. Seed must be protected from moisture, rodents, and insects. Very moist seed will rot. Even if your seed is not moist enough to rot, it may be moist enough to grow mold. This is a problem for two reasons. First, moldy seed cake does not taste good to animals. They may not be willing to eat moldy feed. Worse, some kinds of mold make mycotoxins such as aflatoxin. These poisons can make people and animals sick. Some of the poisons from moldy seed will end up in the oil, but most remain in the seed cake. They can also get into the meat, eggs, and especially the milk of the animals that eat the cake.
Mold spores (seeds) are present in all crops. Molds grow best in warm, humid weather. To prevent the growth of mold, dry the seeds shortly after harvest. Even dry seed can quickly get damp by being in contact with damp earth. Once the seed is dried and bagged, it must be stored carefully to keep it from taking up moisture. The moisture content of the seed should be no higher than 10 percent. To test for moisture, weigh a sample of seed or cake, and then heat the sample in an oven at 300°F for one hour. Reweigh the sample. The weight lost in the oven is equal to the moisture content of the original sample, and the percentage can be calculated: divide the weight lost by the original weight and multiply by 100.

### Other Oil Presses

Several types of small-scale extractors are commercially available, both imported and manufactured in the U.S. Two that are commercially available in the U.S. are described here. (See Further Resources for contact information.)

**Komet Oil Expellers**

Komet Vegetable Oil Expellers are manufactured by IBG Monforts in Germany, whose range of products covers small hand-operated as well as industrial machines. According to the product literature, Komet oil expellers feature a special cold pressing system with a single conveying screw to squeeze the oils from various oil-bearing seeds. The machines operate on a gentle mechanical press principle that does not involve mixing and tearing of the seeds. Virtually all oil-bearing seeds, nuts, and kernels can be pressed with the standard equipment without adjusting the screws or oil outlet holes.

The vegetable oil produced needs no refining, bleaching, or deodorizing, as long as the natural taste, smell, and color are acceptable. Generally, any sediment in the oil will settle to the bottom of the collecting...
vessel after approximately 24 hours and form a hard cake. You can then pour the oil through a paper or textiles filter to remove any remaining impurities.

Since the vegetable oil will not reach temperatures higher than approximately 100 to 120°F, all its vital components will be preserved. Therefore, it is excellently suited for natural nutrition. As long as the oil is stored in a dark, cool place, it will have a long shelf life.

You must precondition the seeds before extraction. Big nuts, kernels, and copra (dried coconut meat) have to be crushed to the size of peas on the Komet Cutting Machine “System Crusher.”

**Täby Press**
The Täby Press is a screw press manufactured in Sweden. Various models are available for cold-pressing rapeseed, linseed, flaxseed, sunflower seed, sesame seed, peanut, groundnuts, mustard seed, poppy seed, cotton seed, jojoba, etc. Bengt Jonsson is the designer, manufacturer, and seller of the oil press, and is also a farmer. The Type 20 screw press is distributed in the U.S. by Magic Mill International. (See **Further Resources**.)

**References**

Derr, Jamie, and Vernon Grubinger. 2006. Presentations at the National SARE conference session “Biodiesel on the Farm.” Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. [Author’s note—there are several Chinese oil press manufacturers, including: Henan Double Elephants Machinery, Anyang General International and Chengdu Good Good International.]


Matthies, E. Peter. 2004. Personal communication. See **Further Resources** for contact information.

**Further Resources**


**ATTRA Publications**


Get a free printed copy of any of the above by calling 800-346-9140, or download from the ATTRA National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service Web site.

**Publications from Organizations**

Several private, non-profit organizations involved with development work around the world have publications that provide information on technologies appropriate for smaller-scale farms and businesses. Publications related to small-scale oilseed processing are followed
by contact information for the organizations that distribute them.


Herz, Jonathan. 1995. How to Use Your Ram Press. EWW.

Enterprise Works Worldwide (EWW)
1825 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 630
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-293-4600
FAX: 202-293-5698
info@enterpriseworks.org
www.enterpriseworks.org


This book describes a small-scale process of oil-extraction for use in rural areas, as well as ways to market and distribute the oilcake.

This book is aimed at volunteers training for food processing projects and their trainers, and for the non-specialist already involved in projects and seeking specific information on technology choice. Contents cover raw materials from which oil can be extracted, methods of oil extraction and processing, descriptions of types of improved technologies, case studies, a checklist of questions to ask when planning a project/enterprise, facts and figures on a range of pre-processing and extraction equipment, references, further reading, and contacts.

The food processing section of the book describes the stages and equipment needed to process a wide range of food commodities, from fruit and vegetables to dairy products, meat, and fish. The directory section catalogs all the food-processing equipment a small industry might need and provides contact information for manufacturers.

Intermediate Technology Development Group
To subscribe to Waterlines or Small Enterprise Development contact
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Fax: +44 (0) 1206-799331

To order a book, call
Phone: +44 (0)1926 634501 (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday, U.K. time)
Fax: +44 (0)1926 634502
sales@portlandpress.com
www.itdgpublishing.org.uk

This book looks at the steps involved in removing oil from peanuts (groundnuts) and dried coconut (copra) using small-scale mechanized equipment. It should be helpful in either starting a business or in identifying where in the process technical improvements may be made. It provides detailed technical and economic information on small-scale oil extraction mills using either small expellers or power ghans, and processing between 100 tons and 220 tons of materials per year. (A ghani is a large mortar and pestle-style processor traditionally powered by oxen.) An economic comparison between these small-scale plants and medium- to large-scale plants is provided.

International Labour Office (ILO)
4 route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland
The memorandum is available at:
www.wikigreen.org/~wikigree/index.php/Small_Scale_Oil_Extraction_from_Groundnuts_and_Copra

Casten, James, and Harry E. Snyder. No date. Understanding Pressure Extractions of Vegetable Oils. 15 p. *This technical brief outlines the procedures and equipment required to extract vegetable oil using presses.*

Kessler, Nathan. No date. Understanding Solvent Extraction of Vegetable Oils. VITA. 12 p. *This technical brief outlines the procedures and equipment required to extract vegetable oil using solvents.*

PACT Publications
1200 18th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-466-5666
books@pact.org
www.pactpublications.com

Richards, Keith, and Deborah S. Wechsler. 1996. Making It On the Farm: Increasing Sustainability Through Value-added Processing and Marketing. Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group. 40 p. *This booklet is written for farmers who want to take a bite out of the middlemen by bringing the dollars for processing, packaging, labeling, and marketing home to their farms, and for local community leaders who want to encourage farm-based, value-added businesses in their communities. Compiled from interviews with southern farmers and ranchers who are adding value to their products, it describes some of their practices, discusses 10 keys to success, and includes a list of resources. Although some of the resources listed are in the southern region, most have counterparts in other states and regions. Cost is $10, payable to SSWAG, and includes shipping and handling. Order from:*

Southern SAWG Publications
P.O. Box 324
Elkins, AR 72727
ssfarm@lynks.com


**Machinery and Equipment Sources**

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www.seedburo.com

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Phone/FAX: 250-833-0275
Email: edwardbeggs@plantdrive.com

Rosedowns Presses: The Mini Press Range
Contact: On Web page.
www.rosedowns.co.uk/products/Mini_Press.htm

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www.oilpress.com/

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Phone: 845-368-2532
FAX: 845-368-2533
contact@magicmillusa.com
www.magicmillusa.com

Huntsman, Inc
2362 Warren Ave.
Twin Falls, ID 83301
Phone: 208-733-2214 or
Toll-free: 877-733-2214
FAX: 208-733-2240
mail@huntsmaninc.com
www.huntsmaninc.com

Food Processing Machinery & Supplies Association
1451 Dolley Madison Drive, Suite 200
McLean, VA 22101
Phone: 703-761-2600
FAX: 703-684-1080
info@fpsa.org
www.processfood.com/

Huntsman, Inc. supplies used and reconditioned food-processing equipment, including seed cleaners and packaging.

Food Protein R & D Center
Cater-Mattil Hall 373 Olsen Blvd.
2476 Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-2476
Phone: 979-845-2741
FAX: 979-845-2744
marwaha@tamu.edu
http://foodprotein.tamu.edu/

The mission of the Oilseeds Processing Program is to conduct basic and applied research to help add value to oilseeds and to serve as a technical resource to the oilseeds processing industry.

The Oilseeds Processing Program has experience with essentially all row-crop oilseeds as well as a number of industrial crops. Row crop expertise includes familiar edible oilseeds such as soybeans, cottonseed, corn germ, canola, peanuts, sunflower seed, safflower seed, and flax seed. Industrial crop expertise includes castor seed, rape seed, crambe, jojoba, and others in various stages of commercialization. Specific services include practical short courses and customized training.

Individual and Organization Contacts

Mark Muller
Badger Oil
1400 South River Street
Spooner, WI 54801
715-635-2197
FAX: 715-635-7262
muller@wbic-newventures.com

ECHO
17391 Durrance Rd.
N. Ft. Myers, FL 33917
Phone: 239-543-3246
FAX: 239-543-5317

www.nurpc.com

Badger Oil uses Komet equipment for oil seed processing. The company can do contract pressing or provide consulting services for anyone who wants to do on-farm processing.

E. Peter Matthies
EPM Distributing LLC
20 Marshall St.
d-52066 Aachen
Germany
Phone: +49 241 160 7122
FAX: +49 241 160 7123
fruitoil@hotmail.com

E. Peter Matthies, who formerly worked for Badger Oil Company, now lives in Germany. Matthies has years of experience with seeds from fruits, vegetables, herbs, and even weeds. He is licensed to represent Monforts worldwide and provides free consultation with the purchase of KOMET oil presses. Contact him by e-mail or phone.

Huntsman, Inc. supplies used and reconditioned food-processing equipment, including seed cleaners and packaging.
ECHO—Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization—is a non-profit, Christian organization dedicated to the fight against world hunger. ECHO's Web site provides access to resources and services for small farm tropical agriculture from around the globe. ECHO's most popular publications are online, and include several about oilseed crops. A for-sale publication is The Manual Screw Press for Small-Scale Oil Extraction.

**Web Sites**

“Now Build This—The Sunflower Seed Huller and Oil Press.”
www.green-trust.org/2000/biofuel/sunfloweroil.htm

Tiny Tech UDYOG
www.oil-refinery.com

Armfield Limited
www.armfield.co.uk/index.shtml

www.oekotec.ibg-monforts.de/en/12.html
Is a list of contacts (including USA) for Komet Seed Presses.

### Oil-containing seeds, nuts, kernels (from IBG Monforts product literature)

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<td>Cashew nut</td>
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Oilseed Processing for Small-Scale Producers
By Al Kurki
NCAT Agriculture Specialist
and Janet Bachmann
with research assistance by Darron Starks and
Dana Brandon
NCAT Agriculture Interns
For technical assistance, contact Al Kurki
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This publication is available on the Web at:
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