



## Wormseed

Wormseed was one of the most planted crops in Carroll County, Maryland from 1840 until the 1960's. The plant was harvested and distilled to create oil. This oil could help defend against parasites like ringworm, hookworm and tapeworm in humans and animals. It was also used to remove termites and preserve the wood on ships. At the height of the industry, census records show that wormseed farming produced approximately 38,000 pounds of oil from around 900 acres of land by 240 farmers. One acre of wormseed yielded 45 to 65 pounds of oil with an average selling price ranging from \$2.50 to \$7.00 per pound.

Wormseed beds were created out of decaying leaves and were prepared in February. This allowed the crop to reach its maximum height. The soil required great attention to keep the dirt loose and fluffy. Seeds were planted and fertilized in March, and once the plants were about five inches tall, they were transplanted from their beds to the fields by hand. Transplanting usually occurred in May. The dibbler (pictured left below) was used by farmers to create holes in the ground to put the plants in. A farmer would average about eight to ten thousand plants per acre.

Harvesting began in the fall, usually in September. Wormseed cutters (pictured right below) were created from saw blades and other strong metals to be able to cut the plant when it was ready. Wormseed had to be planted, cultivated and harvested by hand in order to preserve the oil that was in the pods. Once the plant was harvested, it was left in the fields to dry. Once dried, the wormseed was placed in wagons and taken to a distillery to be distilled. Early methods of distillation consisted of a still, located by a spring, with iron pots laid on a platform (pictured middle below). The oils would be extracted through a boiling process and then placed in a cooling tub which condensed the vapor into a liquid. This process would produce about six to eight pounds of wormseed oil per day.





## **Wormseed Word Find Puzzle**

Find these words in the puzzle below.

Barrel

Carroll County

Hook Worm

Plant

Tape Worm

Dibbler

Boiler

Distillation

Kettle

Ring Worm

Wormseed

Oil

K G A A P C V R H M H N Y J I  
G E P O X A I G O F O Y T F T  
I D T N M N D F D I F V N C W  
M U Q T G M T O T X P H U U B  
I V D W L D J A X V L P O L A  
W V O P L E L E R R A B C H M  
Y R E G S L U E P K N Y L U Z  
M C M Y I D R A B E T Z L R P  
I W C T L T E E Y O D X O E G  
F R S I N C G E L R F P R L R  
L I O W C L Y O S I N W R B E  
D H O O K W O R M M O V A B J  
J P P D N S F O Y A R B C I Q  
T N M M R O W E P A T O O D L  
Q F R A E G O X M Z M W W T R