



Wild American Ginseng

Information for Harvesters, Dealers and Exporters

American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is an important native plant that grows in hardwood forests of the United States from the Midwest to Maine, with the heart of the range occurring in the Appalachian Mountains. The roots of this plant have long been used for medicinal purposes, originally harvested by Native Americans.

The majority of wild American ginseng roots harvested in the United States are exported to Hong Kong and mainland China, which became an important importer in the mid-1700s. Today, the harvest continues to have strong economic and cultural importance for many communities in the United States. The U.S. annual wholesale value of wild American ginseng roots is estimated at approximately \$26.9 million.¹

Good Stewardship of American Ginseng

To ensure the long-term sustainability of wild American ginseng, harvesters, dealers, and exporters share responsibility to follow applicable laws governing harvest and trade in ginseng and to be good stewards for ginseng and its habitat. If this responsibility is not upheld, wild ginseng could become depleted and disappear from native forests.

Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and the Menominee Indian Tribe Reservation of Wisconsin allow the harvest of wild American ginseng, subject to regulations on the harvesting and trade of the species, that are intended to sustain it in the long term.

¹ Chamberlain, J. L., S. Priskey, M. McGuffin. 2013. Understanding the relationships between American ginseng harvest and hardwood forests inventory and timber harvest to improve co-management of the forests of eastern United States. *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* 32:605–624.



Gary Kauffman/USFS

A brochure on “Good Stewardship Harvesting of Wild American Ginseng” for each of the 19 States, with each State’s regulations, can be downloaded for free at <http://www.ahpa.org/Default.aspx?tabid=154>. The brochures were developed in partnership with and are maintained by the American Herbal Products Association.

Harvesters should use good stewardship practices for harvesting ginseng, including:

- **Follow State and Tribal regulations for harvest season and plant age and/or size** to allow American ginseng plants time to produce seeds for future population growth. The States and Tribe that allow commercial harvest of ginseng require plants to be at least five years old and/or have 3 compound leaves with 3-5 leaflets, whereas some require plants to be 10 years old and have 4 compound leaves with 3-5 leaflets. Generally, ginseng harvest season starts September 1. To learn more about the requirements,

please contact your State or Tribal regulatory office, or visit <http://www.ahpa.org/Default.aspx?tabid=154>.

- **Plant the seeds from red fruits** to contribute to wild American ginseng population growth. Always plant the seeds of the roots you harvest. To plant seeds, first squeeze the fruit to force out and remove the seeds, plant the seeds separately, about a foot apart and an inch deep and cover them with leaf litter. Be sure to plant the seeds near where the parent plant was harvested.
- **Only plant the seeds of wild ginseng found in the area** where you are harvesting. Planting commercially produced ginseng seeds or non-local seeds in or near wild ginseng populations can negatively affect the long-term viability of the species through the introduction of genes that weaken populations.
- **Ensure future population growth** by leaving a number of the ginseng plants in the area and, if you are

harvesting in late October, removing the leaves of the plants late in the season. This will protect them from being harvested and allow them to positively contribute to future population growth. Older plants have been shown to produce more seeds.

Dealers and exporters are responsible for complying with and upholding State and Tribal regulations. They should not buy underage roots and/or roots harvested outside the legal harvest/buying season. Dealers and exporters are also discouraged from providing commercially grown seeds to harvesters to supplement native ginseng populations.

I'm interested in harvesting American ginseng. Is it legal to harvest it where I live?

American ginseng can be legally harvested in 19 States and on one Tribe's land (listed above). To learn about the State and Tribal regulations for the harvest of American ginseng, visit <http://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/table-list-of-states-and-tribes-with-approved-export-programs-for-furbearers-alligators-and-ginseng.pdf>. In other States and Tribal lands where it is known to occur, American ginseng is protected from harvest through regulations that vary across jurisdictions. Contact the specific State or Tribal regulatory agency for more information.

It is illegal to harvest American ginseng roots on most State lands and all National Park Service land. Harvest of wild ginseng from U.S. Forest Service National Forest lands is allowed by permit only and is limited to certain National Forests. Visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/locatormap/> to determine whether the National Forest in your area allows ginseng harvesting.

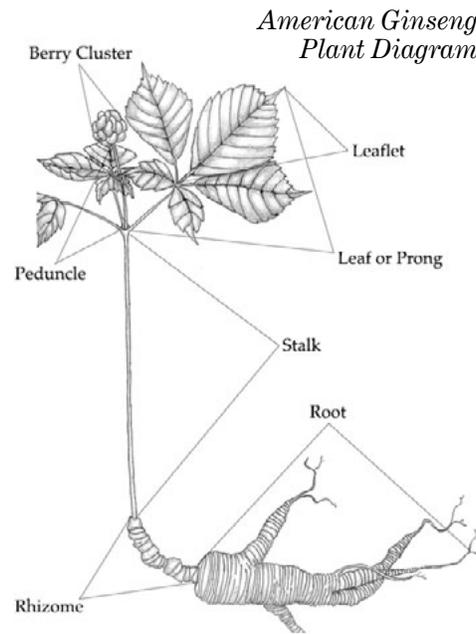
What should I know about American ginseng before harvesting it?

It is the responsibility of the harvester to determine where it is legal to harvest wild ginseng, any restrictions on the method of harvest, the harvest season, and any permits required. Harvesters should also consult the Good Stewardship section above to ensure that they are sustainably harvesting wild ginseng.

The States that allow commercial harvest of wild and wild-simulated ginseng (see definition of wild-simulated below) require plants to be at least five years old and/or have 3 compound leaves with 3-5 leaflets. Other States and the Menominee Tribe require plants to be seven or 10 years old and have 4 compound leaves



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Dr.Sara Souther



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with 3-5 leaflets. To learn more about the requirements, please contact your State or Tribal regulatory office or visit <http://www.ahpa.org/Default.aspx?tabid=154>. Roots of artificially propagated (cultivated) American ginseng of any age can be exported.

Harvesters can age ginseng plants before harvest in two ways:

- Count the number of compound leaves (also known as prongs) a plant has. Ginseng plants typically have 1-4 palmately compound leaves, each with 3 to 5 leaflets. That is a single leaf is comprised of 3-5 leaflets.
- Count the number of stem scars on the rhizome (also known as root neck) of the plant. Each year of plant growth adds a stem scar to the rhizome when the leaf stem dies back in the autumn. Ginseng roots can be aged before removing them from the ground by simply removing the soil around the area where the plant's rhizome joins the root. Once the soil is removed, count the stem scars on the rhizome. A 5 year old plant will have 4 stem scars on the rhizome. If there are fewer than 4 stem scars, carefully cover the below ground portion of plant with soil as it is under aged to harvest.

To learn more about how to determine the age of American ginseng, visit <http://www.fws.gov/international/plants/how-to-determine-the-age-of-ginseng-plants.html>.

All 19 States and the Menominee Tribe have harvest seasons for wild ginseng plants. Ginseng harvested before the season begins will not have produced mature fruits (red in color) with seeds needed for population growth.

Harvesting ginseng out of season is illegal and can result in fines and/or jail time, depending on the law. To learn when the harvest season is in your State or on Tribal lands, as well as any other applicable State or Tribal regulations, please contact your State or Tribal regulatory office or visit <http://www.ahpa.org/Default.aspx?tabid=154>.

I'm interested in exporting American ginseng. What are the regulations on its export?

American ginseng is listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a global treaty

Kerry Wixted



Three-prong ginseng

Kerry Wixted



American ginseng buds

Gary Kauffman/USFS



American ginseng berries

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Ginseng root for sale

enacted to ensure that international trade in plants and animals does not threaten their survival in the wild. The species was listed in Appendix II in 1975 due to concerns about overharvest. Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls.

In order to ensure that the roots are from legal and sustainable sources, a CITES permit is required to export American ginseng. The CITES listing of American ginseng includes roots of both wild and cultivated origin, and covers the export of whole and sliced roots, and parts of roots (including root fibers), but excludes powder or manufactured finished products (e.g., teas, tonics, capsules, extracts, and confectionery).

Export permits are issued based on a legal acquisition finding and a non-detriment finding. That is, findings that the specimens to be exported were legally acquired and that the export of such specimens will not be detrimental to the survival of the species. In the United States, both findings are made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

For the purposes of CITES, wild and wild-simulated ginseng roots are treated and exported as wild, and woods-grown and field-grown ginseng roots are treated and exported as artificially propagated (cultivated).

- **Wild American ginseng** grows in its natural habitat and is not cultivated by humans.
- **“Wild-simulated” ginseng** is American ginseng grown in a forest environment under natural conditions with no cultivation of the plants. Seeds of ginseng are brought into the forest environment, planted, and most often the plants grow without any further human intervention (e.g., removal of existing vegetation, application of fertilizers or pesticides). Consequently, wild-simulated ginseng roots have wild-like characteristics and are often indistinguishable from roots of wild American ginseng plants.
- **Woods-grown ginseng** is American ginseng grown in a forest environment that has been manipulated for this purpose. Plants are typically grown in prepared rows or beds where existing ground vegetation is removed.

- **Field-grown ginseng** is ginseng grown under artificial shade structures.

Wild and wild-simulated American ginseng roots can only be legally exported if they were harvested from plants that are 5 years of age or older and were harvested during the designated State or Tribal harvest season (see the section above for more information on these requirements).

In addition to the CITES regulations on exporting ginseng, ginseng must be certified by the State or Tribal regulatory agency before it can be transported out of the State. Contact the specific State or Tribal regulatory agency for more information, or visit <http://www.ahpa.org/Default.aspx?tabid=154>.

Because of its listing in Appendix II of CITES, exporters of American ginseng must apply for a permit (Form 3-200-34) from the Service. The application form may be obtained through the Service’s International Affairs website (<http://www.fws.gov/forms/3-200-34.pdf>) or by calling 1-800-358-2104. For more information on the permitting process for American ginseng, visit <http://www.fws.gov/international/Permits/by-species/american-ginseng.html>.

Exporters and dealers should also consult the Good Stewardship section above to ensure that they buy roots that were legally and sustainably harvested to help promote the long-term sustainability of wild ginseng.

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May 2014

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