

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wild American Ginseng

*Information for Dealers
and Exporters*



Dealers and exporters play an important role in maintaining healthy populations of American ginseng. Without your help, wild ginseng could disappear from forests, along with the livelihoods of those who depend on it for income.



American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is a native plant that grows in forests of the United States from the Midwest to Maine. The roots of American ginseng have long been used in herbal medicine and were originally harvested by Native Americans.

Most wild American ginseng roots harvested in the United States are shipped to Hong Kong and China. The harvest of ginseng has significant economic and cultural importance for many communities in the United States. The wholesale value of wild American ginseng roots is estimated at approximately \$27 million per year.

Good Stewardship of American Ginseng

Good stewardship of wild ginseng means using and promoting sustainable harvest practices, which contribute to the long-term survival of wild populations and their habitats. Dealers and exporters have an important role to play in the stewardship of American ginseng.

The wholesale value of wild American ginseng roots is estimated at roughly \$27 million per year.

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 and trade of wild American ginseng under certain conditions. These States and Tribe have laws and regulations to help conserve American ginseng so that it continues to survive in the wild.

How to Be a Good Steward: Dealers & Exporters

Dealers and exporters are responsible for complying with all State and Tribal regulations for American ginseng. Please follow these requirements and reinforce good stewardship harvesting practices when buying and trading in ginseng:

1. **Never purchase underage roots and/or roots harvested outside the legal harvest/buying season.** In all 19 States, ginseng harvest season starts in September. To learn more about the requirements, please contact your State or Tribal regulatory office, or visit <http://www.ahpa.org/GinsengStewardship.aspx>. See the section on “Determining the Age of American Ginseng” for more information on how to identify underage roots.
2. **Before buying or selling wild American ginseng, contact your State or Tribal regulatory agency.** Obtain the required State license and always have your ginseng roots certified before shipping them out of the State.

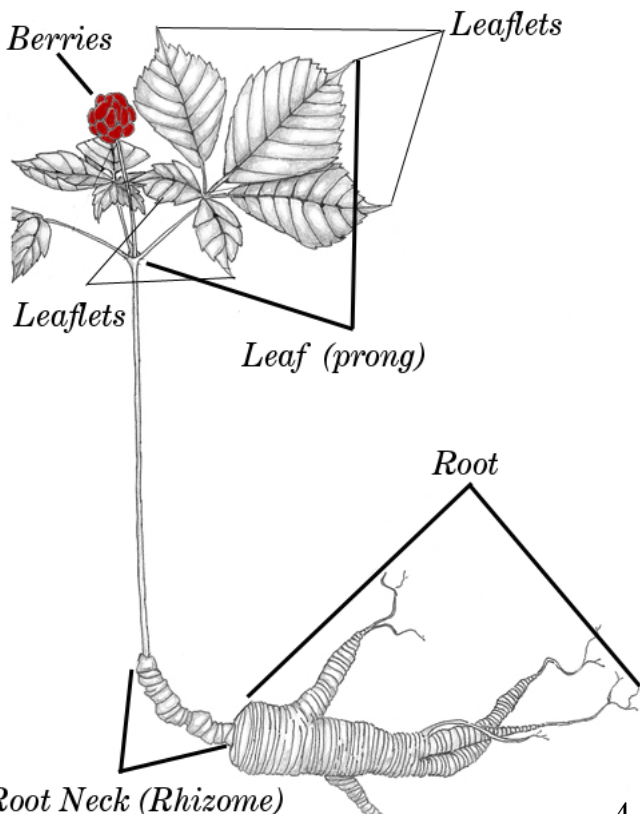


Patricia Ford/USFWS

Wild ginseng roots being inspected by USDA-APHIS

3. **Before shipping internationally, obtain an export permit from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.** See the section on “Exporting Wild American Ginseng” for more information.
4. **Report illegal harvest, buying, selling, and export of American ginseng to State and Federal authorities.** Contact the specific State or Tribal regulatory agency for more information, or visit <http://www.ahpa.org/GinsengStewardship.aspx>. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement can be reached at lawenforcement@fws.gov or 703-358-1949.

American Ginseng Plant Diagram



How to Be a Good Steward: Diggers

Dealers and exporters play an important role in ensuring the sustainability of American ginseng by educating diggers on good stewardship practices. We encourage you to discuss, share, and reinforce the following guidelines:

1. **Get permission from the property owner to harvest ginseng on private property.**
2. **Check the laws and regulations before digging on State and Federal lands.** It is illegal to harvest American ginseng roots on most State lands and all National Park Service land. Harvest of wild ginseng on U.S. Forest Service National Forest lands is limited to certain National Forests. Diggers must obtain a permit from the U.S. Forest Service where harvest is allowed. To find the National Forest in your area, to see if ginseng harvest is allowed, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/locatormap/>. To learn about the State regulations for the harvest of American ginseng, visit <http://www.ahpa.org/GinsengStewardship.aspx>.
3. **Only harvest during the open harvest season so plants have time to reproduce.** In all 19 States, ginseng harvest season starts in September.
4. **Harvest only mature (3-and 4-prong) plants that are at least 5 years old. Some States require plants to be 10 years old.** See the section on “Determining the Age of American Ginseng” for more information.
5. **Harvest only plants with red berries.** Each red berry contains 1-3 seeds.



Red ginseng berries

6. **Plant seeds from the harvested plants in about 1 inch of soil and leaf litter near the harvested plants.** Squeeze the berry to force the seeds out, then plant the seeds about a foot apart and an inch deep and cover them with leaf litter. Be sure to plant the seeds near the harvested plants.
7. **Leave some mature plants for the future.** After harvesting some of the mature plants (with red berries) and planting the seeds, remove the leaves of the remaining ginseng plants in the patch. This will hide the plants and protect the roots from being harvested so that the plants can produce seeds next year.
8. **If young plants are disturbed while digging for larger roots, plant them back in the same spot.** It's important for these younger plants to mature and produce seeds before they are harvested.
9. **Collect and plant only the seeds from the ginseng patch where you are digging.** Do not plant seeds from outside sources, such as those purchased online or from growers, in or near wild ginseng patches. Planting non-local ginseng seeds can weaken populations and threaten the long-term survival of wild ginseng.

Did you know?

It is illegal to harvest American ginseng roots on most State lands and all National Park Service land.

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/GinsengStewardship.aspx>.

The brochures were developed in partnership with and are maintained by the American Herbal Products Association. We encourage you to

print the brochure specific to your State and distribute to diggers.

Determining the Age of American Ginseng

Most States that allow harvest of ginseng roots require plants to be 5 years of age and/or have 3 leaves (prongs). Other States require plants to be 10 years of age and have 3-4 leaves (prongs).

Counting stem scars

Ginseng roots can be aged by counting the number of stem scars on the root neck (rhizome) of the plant. Each year of growth adds a stem scar to the root neck when the leaf stem dies back in the autumn. A 5-year-old plant will have 4 stem scars on the root neck, and a 10-year-old plant will have 9 stem scars.

Diggers can also use this method to determine the age of a ginseng plant without removing it from the ground. Simply remove the soil around the area where the plant's root neck joins the root and count the stem scars on the root neck.



USDA-APHIS

Each year of growth adds a stem scar to the root neck. You can determine the age of a ginseng plant by counting these stem scars.

Did you know? A ginseng root can be aged without removing it from the ground.

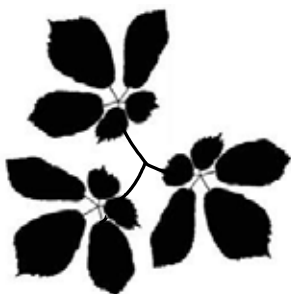
If there are fewer than the required number of stem scars (4 or 9, depending on the State or Tribe age requirement), the root is under aged and is illegal to harvest, purchase, and export.

Inspectors with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS), count the stem scars on the root neck to determine the age of ginseng roots before they can be exported. That's why it's important to keep the root neck attached to the ginseng root.

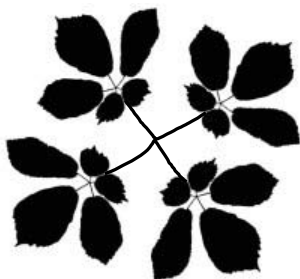
Counting the leaves

Before harvesting roots, diggers can count the number of leaves (prongs) on a plant. Please refer to the American Ginseng Plant Diagram on page 5 of this brochure to determine the difference between leaves and leaflets. Ginseng plants have 1-4 leaves, and each leaf has up to 5 leaflets. That is, 3 leaves (prongs) will have up to 15 leaflets, and 4 leaves (prongs) will have up to 20 leaflets.

Eric P. Burkhardt



*3-prong stage;
3 leaves, up to 5
leaflets on each leaf*



*4-prong stage;
4 leaves, up to 5
leaflets on each leaf*

Exporting Wild American Ginseng

American ginseng has been listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1975. CITES is a global agreement to ensure that international trade in plants and animals doesn't threaten their survival in the wild. Appendix II includes species that are not currently at risk of extinction, but may become so without trade controls.

Because of the CITES Appendix-II listing, an export permit is required for the international shipment of whole and sliced American ginseng roots, as well as parts of roots (including root hairs). Powder or manufactured finished products (e.g., teas, tonics, capsules, extracts, and candy) do not require a permit.

All wild and wild-simulated American ginseng roots for export must be from plants 5 years of age or older (i.e., 4 or more stem scars on the rhizome).

Anyone planning to ship American ginseng roots, or parts of roots, internationally must apply for and obtain an export permit from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS issues permits based on two determinations:

1. **Legal acquisition:** The American ginseng roots must be legally acquired (i.e., all State and Tribal regulations were followed).
2. **Non-detriment:** The international shipment of American ginseng must not be harmful to the survival of the species.

Wild American ginseng roots must be certified by the State or Tribe where the roots are harvested before they can be transported out of the

State. To obtain contact information for specific State or Tribal regulatory agencies, visit <http://www.ahpa.org/GinsengStewardship.aspx>.

The CITES application form can be downloaded from the USFWS's website (<http://www.fws.gov/forms/3-200-34.pdf>), or you may call 1-800-358-2104 to obtain the form. For more information on the permitting process for American ginseng, visit <http://www.fws.gov/international/Permits/by-species/american-ginseng.html>.

All international shipments of American ginseng roots must be inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS). For more information on USDA-APHIS requirements, visit <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/aphis/home>.



Courtesy of Eric Burkhart

Wild ginseng for sale in a high-end Chinese boutique

Remember...
the future of wild American
ginseng depends on YOU!

For more information, please visit:
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service International Affairs
<http://www.fws.gov/international>

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Animal and Plant
Health Inspection Service
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>

USDA-Forest Service
<http://www.fs.fed.us/locatormap/>


American Herbal Products Association: Good
Stewardship Harvesting of Wild American Ginseng
[http://www.ahpa.org/GinsengStewardship.aspx.](http://www.ahpa.org/GinsengStewardship.aspx)

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