

VIRGINIA GINSENG MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

WHAT IS GINSENG AND HOW IS IT USED?

Ginseng is a perennial herbaceous herb that is native to the eastern half of the United States. Its root, which is believed by many to have special medicinal properties, is valuable. It is believed to be a cure for many ills and to have strength building qualities. The greatest markets for the ginseng roots are overseas; most ginseng is exported to Hong Kong for processing and resale.

IS WILD GINSENG A THREATENED SPECIES?

The status of the plant varies greatly from area to area and at present there is no accurate answer to the question. Because of a long history of exploitation it has never had a chance to become abundant and many people believe the abundance of wild ginseng has diminished in certain areas. In areas where collectors have been especially active for a long time, supplies have diminished slowly to the point where the plants are extremely hard to find.

In 1973, the United States and other countries, that collaborated in developing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), agreed to certain restrictions on international trade of wild American ginseng. American ginseng must be accompanied by federal permits when exported.

Criteria used in determining a state program's qualifications for ginseng export are that the State has adopted and is adhering to the following measures:

A state ginseng law and regulations mandating a state digging season and licensing or registration of persons purchasing or selling ginseng collected or grown in that state.

State requirements that the licensed or registered ginseng dealers maintain true and complete records of their ginseng purchases and provide copies of such records to the state in signed and dated statements at least every 90 days and a year-end accounting of purchases for the year.

Dealer records must show date of transaction, whether roots and plants were wild or cultivated, if roots were dried or green at time of transaction, weight of roots, state of origin and identification numbers of state certificates used to ship ginseng from the state of origin.

Inspection and certification by State personnel of all wild ginseng harvested in the state shall authenticate that the ginseng was legally obtained within the state.

PROTECTING THE SPECIES

If the ginseng industry is to survive in Virginia, collectors and dealers must share certain responsibilities. If they do not, supplies of the plant could become severely depleted and the business significantly diminished. There are important steps that collectors may take to perpetuate the wild ginseng crop.

Harvest only after the berries have turned red. Digging roots when the seeds are green may destroy the population, because immature seeds will not germinate when planted.

Plant the seeds from the plants harvested at the site of the digging. The species is thus perpetuated in a habitat where it is established. Remember, it takes two years for the seed to germinate and the plant does not flower and set seed for four or five years.

Dig only mature plants that have four or more leaves called "prongs" and abundant berries.

WHEN DO YOU COLLECT WILD GINSENG ROOT?

In Virginia, the collecting season begins August 15 and ends December 31 of each calendar year, except when wild ginseng is dug from one's own land. A landowner-seller declaration form must be completed when wild ginseng is dug from one's own land and sold prior to August 15 for green wild ginseng and September 1 for dried wild ginseng. The purpose of the restriction is to protect wild ginseng from collection until its seeds have ripened and dispersed, helping to guarantee the establishment of new plants in the wild. It is illegal to possess uncertified ginseng, that was not taken from one's own land, between April 1 and August 14 of each calendar year.

WHO MAY DIG WILD GINSENG AND WHERE CAN GINSENG BE COLLECTED?

You may dig the plant on your own land. If you dig on another person's land without his permission you are committing a crime that could lead to a fine or imprisonment. Digging on most state and federal lands is prohibited unless you have obtained written permission beforehand.

You may dig the plant on some National Forest lands, but you will need a permit to do so. In 1994, the Jefferson and Washington National Forests announced a new policy on ginseng gathering in the National Forest. The new policy sets the National Forest digging season from September 15 to November 30 of each year, and designated that only 4-prong or larger ginseng plants could be taken. Also, the new permit price is \$13.00 per pound green weight, with a minimum purchase of two pounds (\$26.00). For additional information regarding the collection of wild ginseng in the National Forests, please contact the National Forest district ranger's office.

HOW TO COLLECT WILD GINSENG

To remove the ginseng roots, dig up a clump of soil around the plant about one foot in diameter. Gently remove loose soil, taking care not to break off the "tail" roots. Undamaged, whole roots bring the highest prices. Brush off loose soil, allow the roots to wilt for several days, gently wash off the remaining soil, and slowly air dry them until ready to sell. After digging the roots, squeeze the red berries to break the pulp; plant the seeds 12 or more inches apart and ½ inch deep in loosely mulched soil at the same site. Cover the area with leaf litter; examine the population occasionally to remove major weeds, but otherwise leave the area undisturbed.

WHO MAY BUY WILD GINSENG?

Anyone can buy ginseng. However, anyone in Virginia purchasing ginseng for resale must obtain a dealer's license from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services annually. The licensing period is from January 1 through December 31 of each year.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Endangered Species Coordinator
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