



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT
Pesticide & Plant Pest Management Division

AMERICAN GINSENG FAQ's
(Frequently Asked Questions)

Q1 What is ginseng?

A. Ginseng is a hardy perennial plant long highly sought after for its medicinal qualities, some of which are probably both real and imagined.

Q2 How is ginseng used?

A. Ginseng has long been prized for its purported curative properties. Advocates provide numerous claims, some rather unbelievable and on the miraculous side. Claims have been made for reduced stress, enhanced blood flow, blood sugar control, slowing cell degeneration, increased longevity, increased physical stamina, quieting of the nerves, cholesterol control, strengthened metabolism, vitalized body gland functions, improved sexual functions, and many others.

Q3 What does ginseng look like?

A. Ginseng is an unbranched perennial, 8 – 24 inches tall, bearing a single long stemmed flower cluster. Flowers are greenish-white. Berries are bright red. Leaves are usually 3, borne in a whorl, palmately compound. The leaflets are usually 5 (3 – 7), oblong-ovate to ovate, sharply toothed, petioled. It grows in rich woods. Flowers in June and July. Berries are ripe in August.

Q4 Why grow ginseng?

A. Ginseng enjoys great demand for export and for domestic consumption. Wild ginseng has been collected for many years for export to the Far East. It is said that many early trappers made as much money, or more, on ginseng than they did on beaver furs and other pelts. Early explorers are said to have brokered ginseng roots from the native Americans for trade to the Orient.

Q5 Where can ginseng be grown?

A. American ginseng is native to the entire state of Michigan. There are cultivated ginseng growers in the Upper Peninsula and in the northern and southern Lower Peninsula. It should grow on a proper site anywhere in the state.

Q6 What type of site does ginseng need?

A. Ginseng grows best in rich woods with about 80% or 85% "tall" shade, on a northern or northeastern exposure, and on a slope of 3% or greater. It will not tolerate wet soils, but it does need regular moisture.

Q7 Does ginseng grow wild?

A. Yes. It is not a common native plant, but it can be found pretty much statewide.

Q8 What is wild ginseng?

A. "Wild ginseng" means ginseng growing or grown in an uncultivated state or harvested from its natural habitat. Wild ginseng includes ginseng that was introduced to or propagated in its natural habitat by sowing ginseng seed or transplanting ginseng plants from other areas and performing no other standard ginseng horticultural practices.

Q9 If it is native to all of Michigan, what happened to it?

A. The species was formerly quite common. It is felt that it was over-collected for its export value, and is now quite rare. It is not a showy plant for most of the year and could easily be overlooked where it does exist. The seeds are common fare for chipmunk and squirrels. The seed is enclosed in a fleshy pulp, and it germinates best after a period of 18 months when covered by mineral soil. American ginseng grows with wild sarsaparilla, which is quite common in much of Michigan.

Q10 How common is wild ginseng in Michigan?

A. There are no surveys or data available to indicate how prevalent ginseng is in Michigan. That answer needs to be determined before there can be any collection of wild ginseng in the state.

Q11 Can ginseng be cultivated?

A. Absolutely. Ginseng has been cultivated in this country for many years. Wisconsin is the acknowledged leader and they have been growing this crop there since the turn of the century. It is said that 95% or more of this nation's ginseng is either grown in or brokered through Wisconsin. Michigan had a number of persons growing ginseng in the 1930's and 40's but the practice was discontinued years ago until a new beginning in the mid 1980's. We now have the largest woodsgrown ginseng grower in the world located in the Upper Peninsula.

Q12 What is "woodsgrown" ginseng?

A. "Woodsgrown" ginseng means ginseng growing or grown in managed beds under natural shade.

Q13 What's the difference between cultivated and wild ginseng?

A. It's the same species, American ginseng, whose scientific name is *Panax quinquefolius*. Woodsgrown ginseng takes about seven to ten years to mature. Cultivated ginseng is much faster growing and is harvestable at three years. The wild kind is more sought after by the Chinese, however cultivated ginseng is in demand as well.

Q14 Why is the digging or collection of wild ginseng controlled?

A. American ginseng is classified as "threatened" both on a national basis and by the State of Michigan. There are basically three distinct classifications, the first being "threatened," the second being "endangered," and the third extirpated or "extinct."

Q15 Why is ginseng listed as a threatened species?

A. Ginseng is threatened nationally. In 1973, the U.S., along with 24 other nations, were

signers of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which was to go into effect within 90 days after the tenth nation had ratified it. This occurred on July 1, 1975. Ginseng was added to Appendix II, which consists of all species, which although not necessarily threatened with extinction may become so unless trade is subject to strict regulation.

Q16 Can ginseng be collected from the wild in Michigan?

A. No. As a threatened species, collection (the harvesting of) of wild ginseng is not allowed as determined by the Wildlife Management Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, which is assigned the responsibility for the enforcement of Michigan's Threatened and Endangered Species Act.

Q17 Can I export ginseng?

A. Cultivated Michigan ginseng can be certified for export by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. Export is illegal without the benefit of certification. You must have a growers or dealers license prior to sale.

Q18 Where is it marketed?

A. About 95% of the U.S. ginseng is brokered through Marathon County, Wisconsin. Much of it, when legally certified, goes to the Far East. It can only be exported legally when certified by a state certification agency.

Q19 What is it worth?

A. Wild ginseng legally collected and certified can bring \$500 to \$900 or more per pound dry weight. Cultivated ginseng is worth much less, ranging from \$40 to \$100 per pound. Woodsgrown ginseng ranges from \$75 to \$350 per pound.

Q20 Where can I get more information about growing ginseng in Michigan?

A. You can contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Ginseng Program Coordinator in the Traverse City office at 231-922-5233.