

Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Highlight: Ginseng



Ginseng root – (photo credit: adobe)

Other common names: Man root, green gold — Latin Name: *Panax quinquefolius*

Family: Araliaceae (herbaceous, mainly perennial, and bulbous)



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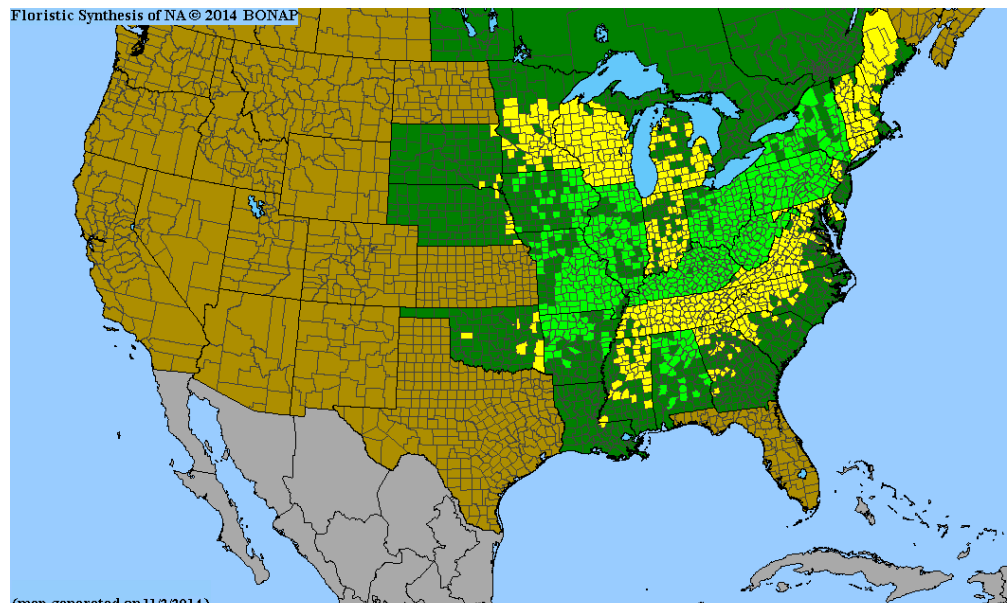
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LUCE #23-10(11)-FS003

Range:

Ginseng was historically found throughout the eastern portion of the United States. It is now mainly found throughout the Appalachian region, with remnant populations still present in its historical range.



Description:

Ginseng is a long-lived woodland perennial with palmate leaves. Ginseng has a forked taproot that securely anchors its off-white fleshy root. First-year seedlings bear only three leaves, a second-year or older plant will have two prongs, three-year plants have three prongs, and older plants can have up to five prongs. Ginseng produces scarlet berries that ripen in late summer.

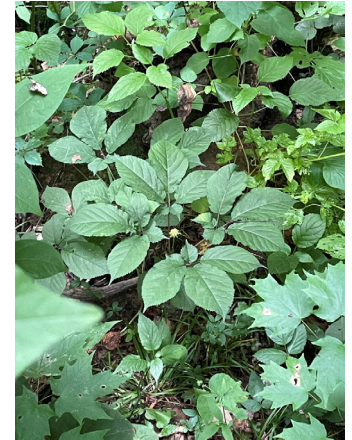


Image of mature four-pronged ginseng.

Propagation:

Ginseng can be propagated by seed or root division. Cultivation by seed takes much longer as the seeds require a period of cold stratification. The seed must be kept moist to remain viable and is typically planted right after it ripens in late summer to early fall. Sow seed about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep every 3 inches in furrows made 1 foot apart. Cover and tramp into the ground securely. The application of mulch is helpful for controlling weeds. Add about 4 inches of composted leaves or sawdust over the bed. Ginseng can also be propagated by root division through neck division, where the root neck and terminal bud are removed and replanted. Roots destined for international markets and those that will be sold whole should not be propagated in this manner.

Pests:

Deer, moles, voles, mice, and slugs will eat ginseng plants. Some farmers choose to use a combination of traps and deterrents to reduce pest pressure. Others will plant additional ginseng to compensate for some losses.

Harvest:

The whole harvest of the ramp plant (bulb and leaves) kills the plant while only cutting the leaves will not. The bulb is the most intensely tasting part of the plant and what has historically been sought after. Just cutting one of the two leaves is a more sustainable approach to enjoying the plant as it leaves the bulb intact to grow another year.

For leaf harvest – Be sure to leave at least one leaf on the plant, this means cutting only one or two, depending on the size of the ramp plant.

For whole harvest – This is considered the most aggressive harvesting method. For whole-plant harvests, target clusters of ramps and remove bulbs to help thin the patch. One approach to help improve the sustainability of whole plant harvest is the cut-stalk or snap method. This non-destructive harvesting technique involves inserting a sharp knife just below the soil and cutting the upper portion of the ramp off, leaving the bulb intact in the soil to continue growing next season.

Conservation status:

Threatened. Ginseng is threatened due to overharvesting and habitat loss.

Market potential:

Of all the woodland botanicals, ginseng has the oldest and most developed market. While the traditional route for marketing ginseng has been selling wholesale to exporters, there are increasing opportunities for growers to sell directly to an herbal retailer or directly to the consumer instead. The demand for ginseng is expected to grow both in the United States and abroad.

References:

Davis, J. & Persons, S. W. (2014). *Growing and Marketing Ginseng, Goldenseal, and Other Woodland Medicinals*. (2nd ed.). New Society Publisher.