

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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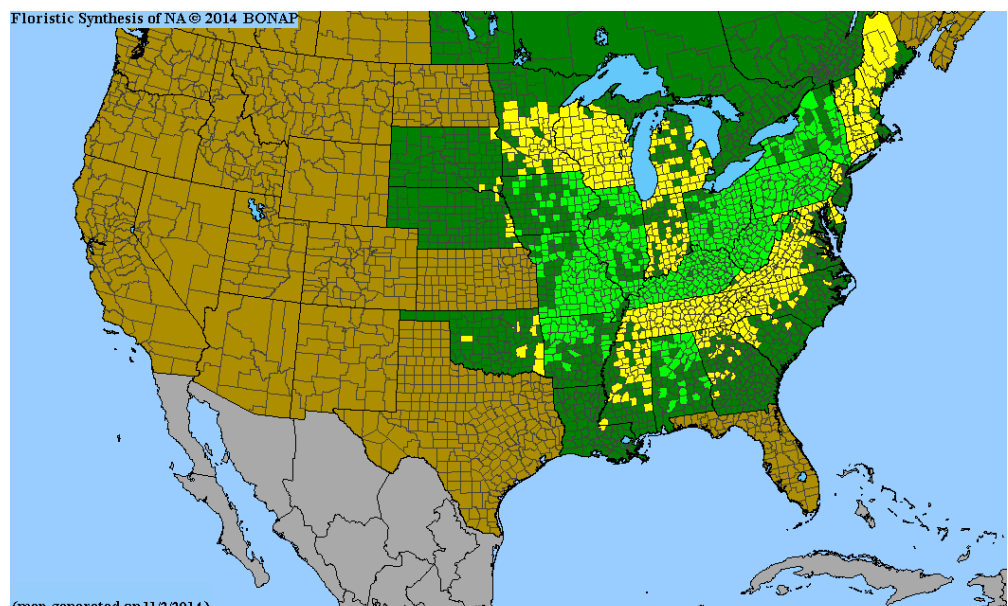
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Range:

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.

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 ½ 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.

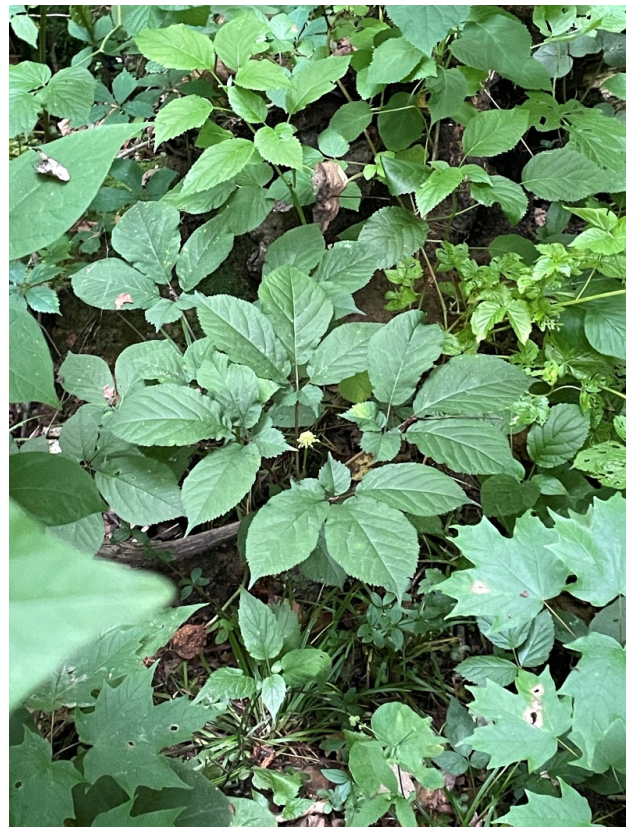


Image of mature four-pronged ginseng.

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 best time to harvest ginseng roots is in the fall after the tops begin to die down. This indicates the plant is done growing for the season. The fall also tends to be the time when the roots have the highest levels of their medicinally active compounds, the ginsenosides. Ginseng requires a destructive harvest, meaning the whole plant is dug up to collect the root. Care should be taken to only harvest mature plants. Mature plants are usually four-pronged and are large enough to produce big clusters of berries. Typically, plants do not reach maturity until they are seven to eight years old in woods cultivated settings. It is important to note that older roots generally sell at higher prices.

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.