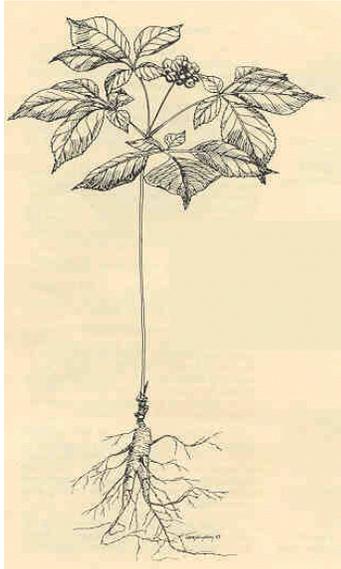


Note: This digital document was adapted from Smith, W. R. 1993. "Preserving Wild Ginseng in Minnesota." Minnesota Natural Heritage Program, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. 7 pages.



# Preserving Wild Ginseng in Minnesota

By  
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## Once abundant ... now rare

When the first white settlers arrived in Minnesota, they found ginseng growing abundantly in the mature hardwood forests which covered much of the territory.

North American Indians had long used its roots medicinally, and records show that large quantities of wild ginseng from the eastern states and Canada were being exported to China as early as the 1740's.

Unfortunately, intensive digging has all but exterminated Minnesota ginseng in most of its former range. Grazing, logging and land development have also played their part in destroying its habitat. Except for a few isolated locations, the only significant populations remaining appear to be in the southeastern portion of the state.

## Is ginseng an endangered species?

At present, wild ginseng is not technically on the endangered list in Minnesota ... but it very easily *could* be in the near future.

Ginseng is one of the wild plants covered by a 1973 international treaty for the protection of endangered species. This treaty was ratified by the United States and 45 other nations. It provides that wild ginseng roots may not be exported unless the Endangered Species Scientific Authority determines that continued exports will not threaten the survival of the species.

Each year, Minnesota and other states in which wild ginseng still occurs are required to report the status of the species and their program to conserve it. Based on this information, the Federal Fish

and Wildlife Service determines whether to permit export of wild ginseng from those states.

Since then, the Federal Permit office has declared exports from certain states to be illegal. Since nearly all American ginseng is exported, this is almost equivalent to making it illegal to harvest ginseng in those states.

So far, export of the wild ginseng from Minnesota is still permitted ... but the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service is watching the situation closely. It has declared that it will continue to authorize export of wild ginseng *only* if it is satisfied that the surviving ginseng population in Minnesota is not endangered and the state is taking effective measures to protect the species.

### **Why this brochure is being issued**

This brochure is published as a part of a conservation program designed to assure the future of wild ginseng in Minnesota. If ginseng collectors are careful to follow the practices described on the following pages, the chances are excellent that instead of facing extinction, ginseng will not only survive but may very likely increase.

*The future of wild ginseng in Minnesota is in the hands of the collectors like yourself.*

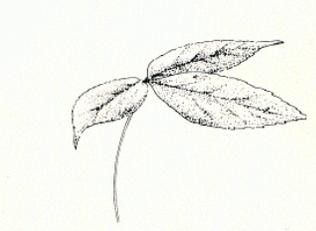
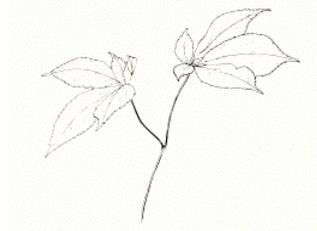
### **When to collect ginseng**

By law, the ginseng harvesting season in Minnesota opens on September 1. It is illegal for collectors to dig, possess or sell green ginseng before that date.

But regardless of date, ginseng should *never* be harvested until the berries are bright red and mature.

Only mature plants with three or more prongs (branches) should be harvested.

*Never* dig plants with only 2 prongs or even small 3-pronged plants which do not have berries. These should be left undisturbed until the plants are sufficiently mature to bear seed and until roots reach marketable size. Roots from 2-pronged plants are small, have little value, and are likely to be rejected by dealers.

 <p><i>First-year seedlings have only a single prong</i></p>	 <p><i>Two-prong plants are immature, have little market value</i></p>	 <p><i>Plants should not be harvested until they have 3 or 4 prongs</i></p>
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### Where to dig ginseng

Ginseng can be harvested from your own land, from private land belonging to others, or from certain public forests and other wildlife management areas.

If harvesting from land belonging to others, it is important that you first obtain permission from the owner. If you do not, you are guilty of trespassing and the laws and penalties pertaining to trespassing will apply.

No one is permitted to harvest wild ginseng in Minnesota State Parks or other areas under the administration of the Division of Parks and Recreation. Harvesting is also prohibited in state Scientific and Natural Areas. Under certain conditions, digging is allowed in state-owned wildlife management areas if a permit is first obtained from the Area Wildlife Manager. No special permission is required for harvesting wild ginseng in state forests.

### How to dig

Care should be taken in digging ginseng. With a simple digging fork or trowel, commence digging about 6 inches from the stem. Remove the soil carefully over a 12-inch diameter circle, digging down until you can see the main root. This is important because the underground stem often proceeds horizontally before it joins the top of the true root.

Continue to loosen the soil to be sure all the main, tail and branch roots are exposed before lifting. Roots broken off and left in the soil represent lost money ... and the highest prices are paid for intact, un-damaged roots.

After digging, brush loose soil from the roots.

Sometimes it is impossible to remove the mature plant without disturbing the roots of smaller,

immature ginseng plants growing close by. When this occurs, replace the smaller roots and pack soil firmly around them. These will be available for harvest in future years.

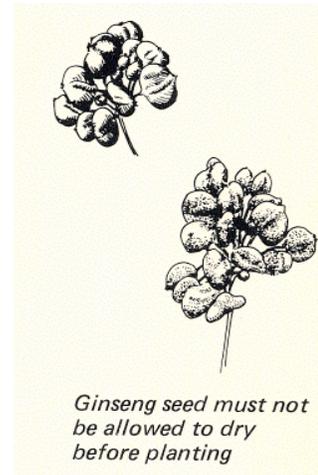
### **Re-seeding for the future**

In nature, very few wild ginseng seeds survive to germinate and develop a new generation. But prompt and *proper* re-seeding by harvesters will increase the chances for germination and help guarantee improved stands and larger yields in future years.

Minnesota regulations require that at time of harvest, all mature seeds must be planted in the *same general area* in which the parent plant was dug. This is to assure that soil and shade conditions will be favorable for the seedlings.

After digging the roots, squeeze the berries to break the pulp. Most berries will contain 2 or 3 seeds. Plant the individual seeds about 6 to 12 inches apart and one-half inch deep in the soil and cover the area with leaf litter.

It is essential that the planting be done promptly before the berries have time to dry out. Once dry, ginseng seed will not germinate.



### **Cleaning and drying the roots**

After digging, allow the roots to wilt for several days before washing off the remaining soil. Do not scrub or scrape the roots as this may damage their natural color and characteristic circular rings. A little soil left on the roots helps highlight the natural rings around the root and may even enhance the value.

Cleaned roots should be dried slowly by natural air. Roots should be placed on a screen or rack outdoors *in the shade* or on shelves in a well-ventilated attic. Temperatures between 75E and 90E are considered ideal. Turn the roots occasionally to make sure they dry evenly and don't mold.

Drying time varies with root size and air conditions; large roots may require 3 or more weeks while small roots often need less than a week. 1 takes about 3 ½ pounds of freshly dug green roots to make one pound of dry roots.

Do not dry in an oven because high temperatures dry the roots too rapidly and scorching will make them worthless.

Once dry, roots should be stored in a cool, dry place where they can be protected from rodents until sold.

## **Selling wild ginseng**

All wild ginseng harvested in Minnesota and not kept for personal use *must* be sold to dealers licensed by and located in the state. For a list of licensed dealers in Minnesota, write to Information and Education Bureau, Marketing Section, Department of Natural Resources, 500 Lafayette Rd., St. Paul, MN 55155.

## **Re-establishing ginseng in areas where it does not presently grow**

If you have woodlands suitable for growing wild ginseng, you may wish to consider re-establishing the population.

Habitat is extremely important. Ginseng generally requires mature hardwood forests with tall trees providing 70-80% shade and in which there is little undergrowth. It grows best on moist but well-drained north- or east-facing slopes and in soils with a pH of 5.5 or higher. Your local ginseng dealer can likely help you locate sources of commercial seed.

For further information on growing ginseng in the woods, write for “*American Ginseng: A forest crop*”, Missouri Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102

or

**Farmer’s Bulletin No. 2201** (“Growing Ginseng”), Publications Division, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20252.

### **Brief summary of Minnesota laws and regulations**

Wild ginseng may be harvested statewide from September 1 through December 31 except in restricted areas described below.

No person is allowed to sell, purchase or possess green roots except during the open season.

During the open season there is no limit to the amount of wild ginseng a collector can dig ... but no person shall dig or disturb any wild ginseng plant unless it has 3 or more prongs (branches).

No license is required of diggers.

Immediately after harvesting wild ginseng plants, the digger shall remove all seeds from the plants' berries and plant them in the area where the plant was dug. Seeds should be planted by removing surface litter, planting each seed at a depth of ½ inch in the soil, and replacing surface litter over the planting site.

No person shall harvest wild ginseng within any state-owned wildlife management area without first obtaining a permit issued by the area wildlife manager.

No person shall harvest ginseng in any state park or other area under administration of the Division of Parks and Recreation. Harvesting is also prohibited in State Scientific and Natural Areas.

Wild ginseng harvested in Minnesota must be sold only to dealers licensed by and residing in Minnesota.

All regulations are subject to change, so it is advisable to contact your local DNR office periodically, and look for notices of new regulations in the newspaper. Remember, it is your responsibility to know and obey all laws pertaining to the harvest and sale of ginseng.

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