

Frequently Asked Questions about American Ginseng in Pennsylvania:

Collecting Ginseng

Follow these considerations to maintain healthy wild ginseng populations:

- Collection is not permitted on state lands
- Collect only mature plants with at least three five-pronged leaves and red berries
- Collect only during harvest season (September 1 through November 30)
- Plant seeds near the harvested plant to ensure future ginseng plants
- Permits are not needed for collection, but you must get permission from a private landowner first
- Poaching is illegal



American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*)

More Information

For more information on American ginseng visit our website:

<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/Ginseng/Pages/default.aspx>

Or call our office at 717-787-3444



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

www.dcnr.state.pa.us

Do I need a permit for collecting ginseng?

Pennsylvania does not have a permit for collecting American ginseng. However, you do need the permission of the land owner to make the ginseng harvested legal for sale. Always ask land owner permission; poaching is illegal. When plants are sold to a licensed dealer you must provide your name and address and the county from where the plants were harvested.

Where can I collect ginseng?

State and federally managed public lands in Pennsylvania do not allow the collection of American ginseng. This includes State Forests, State Parks, State Game Lands and the Allegheny National Forest.

You can grow and maintain your own ginseng on privately owned forested land. If you do not own the land you must get landowner permission.

What is a Vulnerable Plant License?

A Vulnerable Plant License is needed if you want to become a ginseng dealer to buy and sell American ginseng. In order to buy ginseng plants and roots to resell, including out of state, you need this annual license. To maintain this license you will need to report to DCNR Bureau of Forestry the amount of ginseng you bought and sold, who you bought it from, who you sold it to and whether it was green or dried.

How do I harvest sustainably?

Harvesting ginseng removes the root of the plant—along with potential seeds and future plants. To maintain a population for future collection, carefully choose the plants for harvest.

Choose only mature plants with at least 3 prongs of 5 leaflets each (indicating they are at least 5 years old) and with red berries. Do not dig immature plants. Do not remove all seed-producing plants in a population.

Give back what you take. Plant red berries in the vicinity of the harvested plant. Wait till September 1st to harvest, when berries will be ripe. By taking the time to manage the population, you will ensure ginseng harvests to come.

What is a Vulnerable Plant?

They are vulnerable to over-collection due to their beauty, economic value or use in horticultural trade. A license is needed to trade these plants. There are 3 species classified as PA Vulnerable:

- American Ginseng
- Goldenseal
- Yellow lady-slipper orchid

How do I get a Vulnerable Plant License?

Contact DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, Ecological Services at 717-787-3444 to ask for an application. Return the completed application, accompanied by a \$50.00 check payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The license is good until June 30.

POSSESSION OF GREEN GINSENG

It is illegal to possess green ginseng roots between April 1 – September 1 of any calendar year. This is to ensure that collection only occurs during the permitted season.

Collecting the plant too early may mean that immature plants are being collected. This hurts wild populations by not allowing seed to set. This practice also may provide an inferior product.

INTERNATIONALLY REGULATED

Ginseng is regulated by the international trade treaty CITES. States must prove trade does not affect wild populations of species traded.

DCNR reports harvest of wild ginseng to US Fish and Wildlife Service to show our harvest is sustainable. By following DCNR's harvest recommendations, ginseng harvest will be able to continue in PA for years to come.

Questions?

Contact us:
717-787-3444

<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/Ginseng/Pages/default.aspx>



How do I identify ginseng?

Ginseng has compound leaves: each “leaf” contains 3-5 “leaflets” in a palmate pattern (shaped like the palm of a hand). The leaves are often called “prongs.” The leaflets have toothed edges. It can grow up to 2 feet tall in rich, moist somewhat shady woods. The small, greenish flowers in May are often overlooked. The fruit is a bright red berry, in September to October. A mature (harvestable) plant has three or four prongs of five leaflets each.



Three-pronged ginseng (left, Eric Burkhart, PSU; right Meredith Malone, DCNR)

Look-Alikes

Other plants can get confused with American ginseng. Watch out for these “look-alikes.”

Dwarf ginseng (*Panax trifolius*)

This plant is closely related to American ginseng but is smaller, only growing to 6 inches tall. It only has 3 leaflets (not five) at maturity. It is found in the same habitat type. Showier flowers bloom earlier, in late April to early May. The fruit is yellow.



Dwarf ginseng
(Fritzflohreynolds, Wikimedia Commons, CC-SA 3.0)

Wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*)

This plant can have three prongs of compound leaves, and reach about 1.5 feet tall, similar to American ginseng. But wild sarsaparilla's leaflets are arranged down the central stem (“pinnately”) not in a palm-shaped pattern (“palmately”). The fruit is a purplish-black color.



Wild sarsaparilla (Chris Firestone, DCNR)