

# **VIRGINIA GINSENG MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

## **WHAT IS GINSENG AND HOW IS IT USED**

American ginseng is a perennial herbaceous native herb that is native to the eastern half of the United States and Canada. Parts of the ginseng plant are exported or sold domestically and processed for consumption or as additives to food and cosmetic products. Products from the ginseng plant are believed to be a cure for many ills and have strength building qualities. Ginseng root is believed to have special medicinal properties. Leaves from the plant are used as a tea and other consumable products. The greatest markets for ginseng are over-seas. Much of the ginseng harvested in North America is exported to Asia for processing and resale. However, there is a growing domestic market for ginseng products.

## **IS WILD GINSENG A THREATENED SPECIES**

The status of the plant varies greatly from area to area. In Virginia, wild ginseng is included in the Endangered Plant and Insect Species Act as a threatened species. Because of a long history of exploitation it has never had a chance to become abundant and many people believe the abundance of wild ginseng has diminished in certain areas. In areas where collectors have been especially active for a long time, supplies have diminished slowly to the point where the plants are extremely hard to find.

In 1973 the United States and other countries that collaborated in developing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) agreed to certain restrictions on international trade of wild American ginseng. American ginseng must be accompanied by appropriate federal permits when exported. Export requirements are established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and monitored at designated ports by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A list of the export requirements and permits may be obtained by contacting the USFWS International Affairs Office or from their website at [http://www.fws.gov/international/DMA\\_DSA/CITES/plants/ginseng.html](http://www.fws.gov/international/DMA_DSA/CITES/plants/ginseng.html). Criteria used by the Management Authority at USFWS in determining a State program's qualifications for export are that the State has adopted and is following the following measures.

A State ginseng law and regulations that mandate licensing or registration of persons purchasing or selling ginseng collected or grown in that state.

State requirements that these licensed or registered ginseng dealers maintain true and complete records of their commerce in the annually harvested ginseng and provide copies of such records to the State in a signed and dated statement at least every 90 days and a year-end accounting of the total commerce for the year.

Dealer records required to show date of transaction, whether roots and plants were wild or cultivated, whether roots were dried or green at time of transaction, weight of roots, state of origin and identification numbers of State certificates used to ship ginseng from the state of origin. The name and address of the seller or buyer of record of the ginseng shall be maintained by the dealer on his or her own copy.

Inspection and certification by State personnel of all wild ginseng harvested in the State shall authenticate that the ginseng was legally obtained within the state.

## **PROTECTING THE SPECIES**

If the ginseng industry is to survive in Virginia, collectors and dealers must share certain responsibilities. If they do not, supplies of the plant could become severely depleted and the business significantly diminished. There are important steps that collectors should take to perpetuate the wild ginseng crop:

Harvest only after the berries have turned red. Individuals are encouraged to delay harvest of wild ginseng root until after September 15<sup>th</sup>. Digging roots when the seeds are green or immature may prevent germination needed for plant replacement.

Plant the seeds at the site of the digging. The species is thus perpetuated in a habitat where it is established. It may take two years for the seed to germinate and the plant does not flower and set seed for another four to five years.

It is critical that only mature plants be harvested to ensure their replacement and long-term survival. Dig only mature plants that have three or more leaves, called "prongs", and abundant berries. Ginseng plants typically start producing seeds when plants are 3 to 4 years of age. Most ginseng plants produce three prongs between 5 and 9 years of age. The age of a ginseng plant can also be determined by counting the bud scars on the root. A single bud scar is produced every autumn after the plant's stem falls. To determine a plant's age before removal from the ground simply remove the soil around the area where the plant's stem joins the root to count the bud scale scars.

USFWS issues findings through the Divisions of Scientific Authority and Management Authority to prevent the detrimental harvest of ginseng roots. Ginseng that does not meet export requirements established by USFWS will be unmarketable. Harvesters and dealers should consult with the Office of Plant and Pest Services in the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) or USFWS Division of Scientific Authority to determine the current year's export requirements.

## **WHEN DO YOU COLLECT WILD GINSENG ROOT**

In Virginia, the collecting season begins August 15 and ends December 31 of each calendar year, except when wild ginseng is dug from one's own land. A landowner-seller declaration form must be completed when wild ginseng is dug from one's own land and sold prior to August 15 for green wild ginseng and September 1 for dried wild ginseng. Individuals are encouraged to delay harvest of wild ginseng root until after September 15<sup>th</sup> to protect wild ginseng from collection until its seeds have ripened and dispersed, helping to guarantee the establishment of new plants in the wild. It is illegal to possess uncertified ginseng that was not taken from one's own land, between April 1 and August 14 of each calendar year. Ginseng must be inspected and certified by a VDACS inspector before being transported or otherwise removed from the state.

## **WHO MAY DIG WILD GINSENG AND WHERE CAN GINSENG BE COLLECTED**

You may dig the plant on your own land. If you dig on another person's land without his or her permission you are committing a crime that is punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. Removal of plants and other natural resources from state and federal lands is prohibited unless you have obtained written permission beforehand. Individuals should contact the appropriate agency responsible for management of the public lands to determine if ginseng harvesting is permissible and what permits are required.

Permits for ginseng collection are not being issued on the George Washington or Jefferson National Forests due to concerns over the viability of ginseng on the Forests and the high level of time and cost associated with adequately analyzing the effects of collection on the ginseng population which would be required under NEPA for ground disturbing activities that would include digging for ginseng.

## **HOW TO COLLECT WILD GINSENG**

To remove the ginseng roots, dig up a clump of soil around the plant about one foot in diameter. Gently remove loose soil, taking care not to break off the "tail" roots. Undamaged, whole roots bring the highest prices. Brush off loose soil, allow the roots to wilt for several days, gently wash off the remaining soil, and slowly air dry them until ready to sell. After digging the roots, squeeze the red berries to break the pulp; plant the seeds 12 or more inches apart and 1/2 inch deep in loosely mulched soil at the same site. Cover the area with leaf litter; examine the population occasionally to remove major weeds, but otherwise leave the area undisturbed.

## **WHO MAY BUY WILD GINSENG**

Anyone may obtain, and export from the state, up to 8 ounces of ginseng in a calendar year for personal or individual use. However, individuals or companies purchasing ginseng in Virginia for the purpose of reselling the product must obtain a license to do so from VDACS. The licensing period is from January 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year.

## **FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT**

**Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Office of Plant and Pest Services  
Endangered Species Coordinator  
P. O. Box 1163  
Richmond, VA 23218  
(804) 786-3515  
FAX (804) 371-7793**