Important information for harvesting wild American ginseng in the State of Pennsylvania

- No license is required to dig wild ginseng on private land in Pennsylvania.
- A commercial license must be obtained from the state by anyone who intends to export from the state any ginseng harvested in Pennsylvania.
- The state’s harvest season for wild ginseng is September 1 to November 30. Possession of harvested fresh (“green”) ginseng is prohibited from April 1 and September 1.
- Pennsylvania state law requires that all harvested wild ginseng plants have at least 3 prongs of 5 leaflets each, and that plants are collected only when the fruit is red.
- Pennsylvania requires that seeds of collected wild ginseng be planted in the immediate vicinity of the collection site.
- Ginseng may not be harvested on state-owned lands in Pennsylvania.
- The PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, serves as the state’s ginseng coordinator. This office can be reached at (717) 787-3444 or:
  
  6th Floor, Rachel Carson State Office Bldg. 
P.O. Box 8552 
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8552
- A permit is required to collect ginseng in Allegheny National Forest, which can be contacted at (814) 723-5150 or via mail: 
P.O.Box 847 
Warren, PA 16368

For news about American ginseng in PA see: http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/plants/vulnerableplants/ginseng/index.htm.

The information here is believed to be accurate but does not replace the actual laws that govern the harvest and sale of ginseng. Make sure you know and follow all state laws and regulations where you harvest ginseng.

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**GOOD STEWARDSHIP CHECKLIST**

When harvesting wild American ginseng, make sure you follow all of these good stewardship practices:

- Get permission to harvest.
- Harvest only mature (3- and 4-prong) plants that are at least 5 years old.
- Dig only plants with red fruit.
- Plant seeds under 3/4 to 1 inch of soil.
- Leave some mature plants for the future.

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**Information Provided By**

**AHPA**  
American Herbal Products Association  
(301) 588-1171 - ginseng@ahpa.org  
www.ahpa.org  

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**  
(800) 358-2104  
www.fws.gov/international/animals/ginindx.html

The harvest practices presented in this brochure are provided to encourage people who collect wild American ginseng to act as stewards of the plant and its habitat. By following these guidelines, you are contributing to and protecting a sustainable future for wild American ginseng, and preserving a longstanding American tradition.
**Stewardship Harvesting of Wild American Ginseng**

There are a number of harvest practices that must be followed for a collector to be a ginseng steward:

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**Get Permission to Harvest**

Whether you are on private or public land, always get permission before digging ginseng. Some National Forests and state-owned lands will allow harvest of ginseng but require you to obtain a permit. *Harvest is not allowed in any National Park.*

When digging on public land, always obtain required permits and comply with all rules. When digging on private property, get the permission of the landowner or his/her agent. Also, report any signs of property damage, habitat loss, or trespassing to the landowner.

**Respect American Ginseng’s Life Cycle**

American ginseng’s life cycle, as shown, illustrates the life stages of the plant. Seedlings have only 1 prong (leaf), which usually has 3 leaflets. The next phase has 2 prongs, with 3 or 5 leaflets on each. Mature plants have 3 or 4 prongs, each with 5 leaflets.

Researchers have estimated that each ginseng plant in the wild needs to produce over 30 seeds to replace each plant harvested. *Never harvest seedling (1-prong) or juvenile (2-prong) plants, or plants that are less than 5 years old with at least 4 “bud scars” on the “neck” at the top of the root.* Roots from younger plants are not allowed to be exported and many ginseng buyers won’t buy these small roots, so it’s best to leave these plants in the ground for future harvests.

**Dig Some, Leave Some**

Good stewardship requires diggers to leave enough plants so that populations continue to be healthy and plentiful. *Always leave some mature plants in every ginseng patch where you dig.*

**Harvest Only in the Harvest Season**

The harvest season for wild ginseng varies by state. Make sure you know the legal state harvest season where you dig ginseng, and always comply with the state rules.

*Never harvest plants before the fruit is ripe (red).* This is a requirement in most states, and is an essential good stewardship practice.

**Plant Ripe Fruit!!!**

Experienced harvesters know to plant ginseng’s red berries as they dig the roots. This stewardship practice may explain why ginseng is still in the woods after three centuries of digging.

The best practice is to *plant the red berries under ¾ to 1 inch of soil.* Researchers have found that planting the ripe seeds at this depth can produce up to 8 times more seedlings!

**Protect American Ginseng’s Habitat**

Stewards of wild ginseng must care for the plants, as well as its native habitat.

*Be aware of land-use and zoning activities in your community and join with local organizations to make your voice heard.* Though landowners’ property rights should be respected, make sure they are aware of the value of ginseng and other non-timber plants on their land.

**Other Stewardship Practices**

Every ginseng steward should be aware of a few other practices:

- After you dig some of the mature plants in a ginseng patch, and have planted all of the red ripe seeds, break the stems off of any remaining plants so that others don’t take more plants from the same population.
- Think about planting your own woodland ginseng patch with local native seeds so that even more ginseng is produced for the future.