



FACT SHEET

American Ginseng

(*Panax quinquefolius*)

Common Name

American Ginseng, Seng

Plant

Long-lived perennial (50 years +) characterized by three to five palmately compound leaves (prongs). Mature plants have a multi-forked taproot that is sold as a medicinal root primarily within East Asia.



Flowers

Terminal umbel with tiny white flowers May to June, red fruits mature in late August to early September.

Global Range

The plant is broadly distributed in Eastern North America from Quebec province to Minnesota and south to Georgia and Oklahoma. Ginseng primarily occurs in the mountains in North Carolina, with scattered populations in the western piedmont plus a few in the coastal plain. Habitat: Prefers mesic hardwood forest, primarily rich cove forest.

Southern Appalachian Harvest

Wild ginseng has been collected as a medicinal crop for more than two centuries. Harvest rates within western North Carolina have varied from 4,200 to 12,800 dried lbs annually for the past 20 years. Wild ginseng roots are harvested on all ranger districts in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests, with greater intensity on the Nantahala and Appalachian Ranger Districts.

Conservationists, botanists and others have expressed concern over the decline of wild ginseng populations. During this time, the Forest Service has additionally taken steps to crack down on ginseng poaching. North Carolina is one of the six states in the East where wild ginseng harvesting is still permitted on national forest land. Most other national forests have banned ginseng harvests out of concern for the plant's long-term viability.

Beginning in 2013, the U.S. Forest Service National Forests in North Carolina implemented new guidelines for ginseng permits to help protect the plant from further decline.

Permit

Only wild ginseng plants with three or more leaves may be harvested. Permit holders must plant seeds from harvested plants near the site of removal. Carefully planting seed greatly improves germination for this species.

Permits will be issued through a lottery system (selected randomly) by each district office. Persons may submit their names at more than one district office. Those requesting a permit must call or visit the district

office and submit name and address by July 15. Email requests will not be accepted. Written notifications will be mailed to selected applicants by Aug. 15. District offices will issue permits Aug. 20 - Sept. 1 to selected applicants.

Harvesting is allowed Sept. 1-15 starting in 2013. A permit allows a person to harvest wild ginseng only on the district issuing the permit. Each district ranger may limit ginseng harvests to certain areas of the forest each year. Harvest area descriptions and/or maps will be provided to permit holders. Limiting the harvest area will allow plants to regenerate and help prevent theft. See below for more information on poaching.

A total of 136 permits will be issued in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Starting in 2013, the number of permits issued annually by district follows:

- Nantahala National Forest
 - Cheoah Ranger District – 16 permits
 - Nantahala Ranger District – 66 permits
 - Tusquitee Ranger District – 10 permits
- Pisgah National Forest
 - Appalachian Ranger District – 29 permits
 - Grandfather Ranger District – 7 permits
 - Pisgah Ranger District – 8 permits

A permit allows a person to harvest 1-3 wet pounds (at \$40 per pound) of wild ginseng in the ranger district where the permit is issued. A permit holder may harvest up to 3 pounds of wild ginseng in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests annually. Three wet pounds are equivalent to 1 dried pound. Harvest is prohibited in designated wilderness and other natural areas set aside for research purposes, such as Walker Cove and Black Mountain.

Removing any wild ginseng plant or its parts from national forest land without a permit or outside of the legal harvest season is considered theft. Penalties for plant poaching may include a fine up to \$5,000 or 6-month sentence in federal prison, or both. Every plant on the national forest is public property and is sustainably managed by the Forest Service to meet the needs of present and future generations.

Regulatory Agency

The Division of Scientific Authority, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is the regulatory agency that annually assesses if sustainable harvest levels are occurring. Harvest levels and monitoring across national forests are utilized to provide the sustainable harvest determination.

For More Information

For more information about the national forests in North Carolina, visit www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc. This fact sheet is a product of the U.S. Forest Service National Forests in North Carolina, 160A Zillicoa St., Asheville, N.C. 28801, phone 828-257-4200.

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