



AgBrief

Ginseng Management Program

Plant Protection & Weed Management Section

American ginseng is a long-lived perennial plant that grows in woodlands throughout the mountain areas of the Eastern United States and Canada. Dried ginseng roots are highly prized, especially in China and Korea, where they are believed to promote good health and well being. Many different Native American tribes use ginseng as medicine. The biggest market has always been in Asian countries, which buy more than 30 tons of wild American ginseng every year.

Because of its value (currently up to \$1,000 a pound for wild ginseng), ginseng is routinely at great risk of being over harvested and even extinction. Exports of ginseng from Maryland alone are worth as much as \$500,000 annually.

Internationally ginseng has been protected since 1975 under a treaty known as Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which requires its export to be regulated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). **Maryland is one of 19 states with a ginseng management program** accepted by the FWS. States with a ginseng management program must demonstrate that ginseng is legally harvested and that export will not threaten the survival of the species in the wild.

The purpose of the FWS ginseng management regulations are to prevent overharvest and to regulate the export of ginseng by establishing and enforcing guidelines for conservation and harvesting.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture's Ginseng Management Program was established by the General Assembly in 1978 and revised in 1983 to monitor the harvest and to license diggers and dealers of wild, wild-simulated, woods-grown and cultivated ginseng. **The program's goal is to protect American ginseng from over harvesting while allowing diggers to collect wild and cultivated plants.**

Did You Know?

During the 2012-13 season, MDA inspected and certified 153.5 pounds of dry wild ginseng root, 230 pounds of artificially propagated dry ginseng root, and 28 pounds of green root.



Permits:

To protect the harvest, Maryland Law requires anyone who collects and harvests ginseng for sale to have a valid annual **collecting permit**. The permit is currently \$2 a year. Collectors must maintain records for three years that show how much ginseng they collected in each county and the contact information for the dealer that purchased it.

Anyone who buys ginseng for resale or distribution must register as a **ginseng dealer** every year with MDA. The permit is \$20. Dealers, too, must maintain records for three years that show how much ginseng they purchased and from whom. Dealers are required to report sales and export transactions to MDA.

During the 2012-13 season, MDA licensed 10 ginseng dealers and 270 ginseng collectors in the state.



Certification:

Ginseng plants may only be collected if they are at least five years old and were harvested between Sept. 1 and Dec. 15 by licensed collectors. MDA certifies ginseng, whether wild or raised as a crop, to ensure it was harvested legally so that licensed dealers can sell this plant in domestic and international markets. During the 2012-13, MDA inspected and certified 153.5 pounds of dry wild ginseng root, 230 pounds of artificially propagated dry ginseng root, and 28 pounds of green root.



Protecting Ginseng:

The harvest season for wild American ginseng in Maryland and surrounding states is Sept. 1 to Dec. 15 –

about a month shorter than it was a few years ago. This change gives the ginseng fruit longer to ripen and to develop seed that, over time, may allow wild populations to recover from harvest pressures. This process, however, may take many years, and is not guaranteed success if predation pressures such as heavy deer browse and illegal harvest occurs.

Roots from ginseng plants less than five years of age or with fewer than three five-leaflet leaves (three prongs) or with immature seeds (green berries) may not be collected.

Earlier this year, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources banned collection of the sought-after herb on all state-owned lands, including state forests and wildlife management areas. Harvest of ginseng already was prohibited in state parks.

Some farmers and others are becoming interested in cultivating high quality woods-grown and wild-simulated ginseng as a specialty crop, which may also help reduce harvest pressure on wild ginseng and allow wild ginseng populations to rebound.

Anyone interested in growing ginseng in Maryland should contact the MDA Ginseng Management program, 410-841-5920.

A Word About Poaching

Ginseng collectors and dealers, who are surveyed by MDA every year, have expressed concern for several years about the out-of-season poaching of wild ginseng.

Another concern among law-abiding ginseng collectors and dealers is the popularity of a reality show on the History Channel which features poaching of ginseng on private property and illegal, out-of-season harvest. Such portrayals not only do a disservice to the honest people who have made the stewardship of ginseng and other native medicinal plants an important part of their lives, it also undermines the long-time efforts made

by many state and federal agencies and individuals towards conservation of a relatively rare and important native plant species.

MDA and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provide training, information and support to enable more effective policing and prosecution of violators of the regulations and laws that protect Maryland ginseng. This AgBrief is also designed to bring attention to the importance of ginseng management and protection in Maryland.

For more information, http://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Pages/ginseng_mgmt_program.aspx



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