



State of Illinois  
Department of Natural Resources



Photo credit: Gary Kauffman

# American ginseng in Illinois



Illinois  
Department of  
**Natural  
Resources**

Species and  
regulatory  
information  
pocket guide

# Conservation



American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius* L.) is an understory plant found in the eastern deciduous forests throughout the U.S. and Canada. It is valued for its medicinal qualities, particularly in the Asian markets and international trade is regulated due to concerns about its decrease in abundance due to over harvesting.




The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service monitors annual harvest in Illinois and the other 18 states where ginseng collection is permitted to ensure that continued harvest and export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

A screenshot of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website. The header includes the DNR logo, navigation links for 'IDNR Home', 'Bruce Rauner, Governor', and 'Illinois.gov', and a search bar. Below the header is a large banner image showing various outdoor activities: a city skyline at night, people fishing, a person in a wheelchair, a person on a boat, a turkey, and mushrooms. A navigation menu below the banner lists: 'Natural Resources', 'Parks/Recreation', 'Hunting/Trapping', 'Fishing', 'Boating', 'Outreach/Education', 'Safety &amp; Rules', 'Online Services', and 'A-Z'. The main content area has the heading 'Illinois DNR • Hunting' and a sub-heading 'Ginseng Conservation Law and Regulations'. Below this is a paragraph: 'The Illinois Ginseng Conservation Act (Public Act 83-680) became law September 23, 1983, for the purpose of conserving wild American ginseng in Illinois. This law requires licensing and regulation of persons engaged'. A yellow button labeled 'Hunting Home' is on the right.

For enforcement questions, or to report suspected poaching, contact your local conservation officer at <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/LawEnforcement>.

# Illinois regulatory considerations

- A ginseng harvester's license is required, and the license must be in the harvester's possession when they collect or sell wild ginseng.
- The harvest season for wild ginseng is from the first Saturday in September to November 1.
- A ginseng dealer's license is required for anyone who buys ginseng grown or harvested in Illinois. Dealers may purchase ginseng from two weeks after the harvesting period begins through March 1.
- State law requires all harvested plants to be 10 years old (4-leaved), or older.
- The rhizome (root neck) must be attached to the root for inspection.
- Ginseng may not be harvested on state land in Illinois, nor in the Shawnee National Forest or Midewin Tall Grass Prairie.
- Ginseng may not leave the state without inspection and official certification by the IDNR.

| ILLINOIS DNR  |   |
|---|---|
| Issued 03/04/2015 11:14:43 AM   | Agent:00000000 Issue: 01/26/2016 Renewal: 4/30/16                                 |
| Cust # 000-000-000  | DOB MM/DD/  |
| NAME<br>Illinois Department of<br>Natural Resources   |  |
| ADDRESS   |   |
| IDENTIFICATION  | 15  |
| 2015 Privileges   | Expires March 31, 2016<br>License Classification: 0000                            |
| 650 Ginseng Harvester<br>Valid Date: 06/06/2015 - 03/01/2016  |  |
|    | Agent Fee: \$0.00<br>Continuance Fee: \$0.00<br>Total: \$7.50                     |
| Signature X<br><small>I declare in affirmation to exercise only the privileges purchased subject to state law, business regulations, and state and federal standards established by state and federal agencies and further declare that the practitioner has not been suspended in this state, or by any other state or federal agency.</small> |   |

# Identification



American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolis*) grows from a fleshy, often forked taproot which is harvested for its medicinal value. At maturity it has a single whorl (growing from the same point on the stem) of 3-5 palmately com-

ound leaves each with 3-5 toothed leaflets. The leaves are widest just before they reach the abruptly pointed tip, and have small unbranched hairs along the major veins of the leaves. A central cluster of small greenish flowers rises above the leaves, becoming visible mid-June through July, and produces bright red berry-like fruits at maturity (early to mid-September).

Ginseng is most commonly confused with 5-leaved, vining Virginia creeper, shown here growing together.



## Where does ginseng grow?

American ginseng is found in rich hardwoods, often on north-facing slopes or in ravines, and in wooded dune hollows and leeward slopes along Lake Michigan.



Photo credit: Shawna Meyer

### Commonly associated species

Sugar maple

Basswood

Red and white oak

Tulip poplar

Rattlesnake fern

Gooseberry

Jack-in-the-pulpit

False Solomon's seal

# Categories of ginseng

**Wild ginseng** is the root of the ginseng plant which is growing in or has been collected from its native habitat. Wild harvested roots are generally small with a longer neck, often forked, darker in color, and show concentrated growth rings.



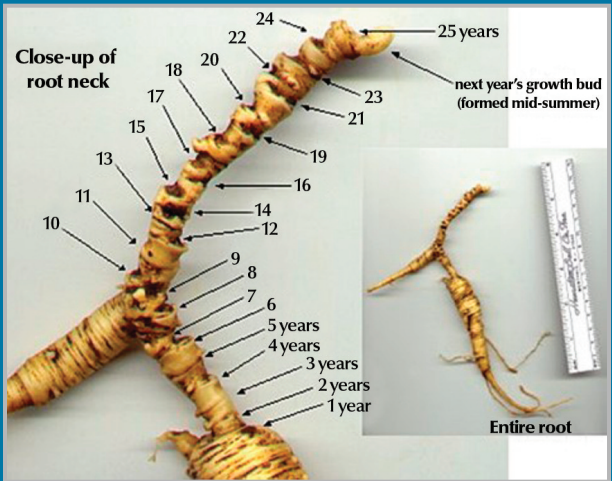
**Wild simulated ginseng** is grown in forested conditions from seed stock with no cultivation of the plants. The appearance of simulated wild roots is virtually indistinguishable from wild ginseng. Wild simulated is regulated as wild ginseng in Illinois.

**Cultivated ginseng** is ginseng grown either in beds under artificial shade or under natural forest shade. Cultivated roots are cream colored, large and heavy with a shorter neck, and often shaped like a carrot.

RETAIL VALUE

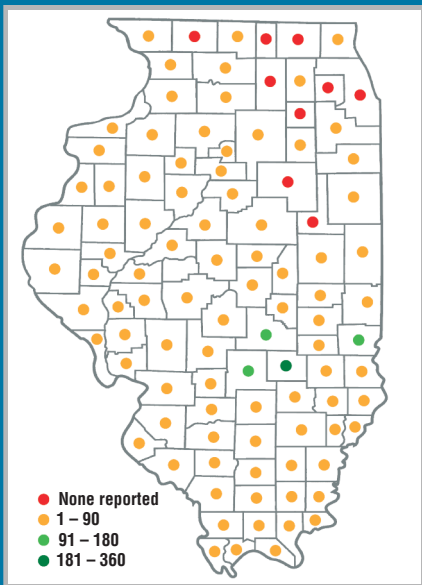


# How to age ginseng roots



Ginseng is a long-lived perennial whose root mass increases each year; the above-ground stem dies back with the onset of winter frost. A leaf scar is added each year on the vertical rhizome (also called the root neck), which sits underground on top of the main root. By counting these scars, the approximate age of the plant can be determined.

# Average Annual Reported Ginseng Harvest by County (lb/yr)



Source: Chamberlain *et al.* 2013