



What you should know about growing #858 **AMERICAN GINSENG FROM ROOTS**

955 Benton Ave., Winslow, ME 04901 • Phone: 1-877-564-6697 • Fax: 1-800-738-6314
Email: service@johnnyseeds.com • Web Site: Johnnyseeds.com

AMERICAN GINSENG ROOTS (*Panax quinquefolius*)

Ginseng is a very slow-growing woods plant native to eastern North America. It is a short plant with upright stem, supporting 3-5 fronds, each with 3-5 oblong, coarsely toothed leaflets. Tiny greenish-white flowers appear starting in spring or summer of the second year. Bright red berries ripen in late July to October. The root is used medicinally as a general energy tonic.

LIFE CYCLE: Perennial, Zones 4-8.

CULTURE: We provide field-grown roots that are 2 years old. Plant roots as soon as they arrive in the fall. IF YOUR ROOTS ARRIVE BEFORE YOU ARE READY TO PLANT, slightly dampen them by wrapping in a moist towel or newspaper. Keep them moist and cool until they are planted. If the roots cannot be planted in the fall, store in damp sphagnum moss in refrigerator for 3 months or more, below 45°F (7.2°C), to satisfy chilling requirement to break bud dormancy in spring. Plant as soon as the soil can be worked in the spring.

You can plant ginseng in the woods. American ginseng grows best in its natural habitat under a hardwood canopy, preferably of oak, maple, sycamore, or basswood. Avoid pine, spruce, hemlock, red cedar, and other conifers due to their shallow root systems (which compete with the ginseng for nutrients). You can also use artificial shade. A system that works well is wood lath or slat shade frames erected over the beds, and supported by a framework of strong poles high enough to walk under. The laths or slats are nailed so that about 2/3-3/4 of the direct sunlight is cut off from the growing plants. (In certain home garden situations, you can also plant a few ginseng plants close to the N. side of the house.)

In laying out your ginseng beds, design them so that they will receive the most natural shade and the sun will not bear down on any one area of plants too long. Work the beds six inches deep, raising the center of the plant beds to allow for water run-off. Amend heavy or clay soils with plenty of sand, compost, or leaves to lighten the soil and improve the drainage. Good drainage is critical to ensure healthy ginseng plants. Plan on preparing your ginseng beds the summer before planting.

PLANTING: Plant roots at an angle (30-45° from vertical) with the bud an inch below soil surface. Space plants 4-6" apart in rows that are 6-12" apart. Apply several inches of mulch.

You can barely see the young shoots when they first appear. They look like small bean sprouts and have only three small leaves. Weeds need to be pulled up carefully so as not to disturb the roots. Once the ginseng is well established, keep well weeded. A good mulch will help prevent weed growth.

LIGHT/SOIL REQUIREMENTS: Ginseng requires at least 70% shade. It grows best when planted in a light-textured woods loam, high in humus. Maintain a pH of 5-6. The best fertilizers for ginseng are leaf mold (rotting forest leaves) or well-decomposed compost.

HEIGHT: 8-16".

HARVEST: Roots may be harvested as early as the end of the third growing season. Since the ginsenoside content increases dramatically between the fourth and fifth years, many growers wait until then to harvest. Timber plantings can add a year or two to the harvest schedule. Roots should be dug in the early fall (late August or early September) as the ginsenoside content is highest right after the tops have died down and the roots have entered dormancy. Clean thoroughly by washing, being careful not to rub off the "rootlets." Roots are placed in a single layer and dried on screens in a warm, not hot (max. 100°F. or 38°C.), airy place such as an upstairs room (never in direct sunlight). Full drying time is fifteen to thirty days.

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