



Herb of the Month: American Ginseng



American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolia*) is the world's most prized ginseng root. This herb grows in the northeast of the United States and Canada. In the U.S. it is found from Michigan to Wisconsin and also to a lesser degree in the southern states. A large wild concentration lies in the Appalachian Mountains, although wild American Ginseng is currently considered endangered. Yet, since the early 1700's, American ginseng has been wild crafted and exported to China and Korea.

Today true wild American ginseng can go for as much as \$600.00 per pound, but strict harvesting regulations are in place. This perennial herb inhabits hardwood forests on well-drained porous soils with topsoil rich in humus formed from hardwood and other leaf litter. When cultivating, fall planting as early as September is recommended for best results. In the spring white flowers appear and soon after red berries containing 2-3 valuable seeds.

Ginseng is a high value, cash crop that requires 4 to 5 years of growth before it is ready for harvest. After the ginseng roots are harvested, the growing beds are prepared and another 5 year growing cycle begins. Wisconsin is the leading state for ginseng production with 785 farms which account for about 95 percent of all acres harvested. This is largely due to its unique soil and growing conditions.

Native Americans valued this herb long before it was "discovered" by white settlers. The Cherokee used the root for colic, nausea, vomiting, asthma and chronic coughs. Ginseng was one of the five most important medicines among the Seneca Indians, primarily used by the elderly. A Crow legend holds that Gray Bull's wife had revealed to her in a dream that chewing the root would induce childbirth without suffering. An infusion of the leaves was equally effective when drunk by the woman. The Menominee used the root as a tonic and to strengthen mental powers. The Oklahoma Seminole used the root to cure nose bleed, shortness of breath, and as a "woman catcher". The Ojibwe harvested the root to sell or trade. This tribe followed the ethical practice of harvesting the roots only when the red berries were mature, and before they were ready to drop. The whole fruiting tops were planted in the hole from which the roots were dug, thus helping to insure a long term sustainable harvest.

American ginseng or Xi Yang Shen is considered a Yin and Qi Tonic in Chinese traditions, and is good to reduce heat of the respiratory or digestive systems and is considered a calmative (having relaxing properties). Consequently, consumers in subtropical and tropical regions of Asia prefer American ginseng, as it is a cooling Qi (energy) tonic, which will reduce heat in the system, while acting as a general tonic. Thus it is used for chronic afternoon low-grade fevers and irritability and thirst after fevers. It also treats night sweats because of its cooling nature and is also nourishing and thus helps with menopause. It is considered a demulcent (soothing to mucus membrane) herb and is especially beneficial to dry lung issues and loss of voice.

Panax quinquefolius, has been one of the best-known American medicinal plants throughout history. Saponins are considered the primary biologically active components of *Panax* species. The major saponins in *Panax* are termed ginsenosides. Concentrations of total ginsenosides were reported to be higher in wild American ginseng root than cultivated root. It also contains traces of essential oils and traces of germanium, which may be partially responsible for its remarkable action.

Good Earth sells this herb in bulk, liquid extract and capsules as well as in a few formulas.

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