

Adding Value To Forestlands With American Ginseng and Goldenseal

History and Culture

American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) and goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*) have been harvested for their medicinal properties and economic value for over 300 years in eastern North America. Since the late 1700's, Native Americans, hunters, trappers, and rural families have relied on the harvest of these plants during tough economic times and for personal health.



The long history of wild-harvesting in Appalachia has left wild populations threatened throughout much of their native range. Irresponsible harvesting practices and habitat loss have contributed significantly to population decline. As wild plants have become less abundant, many people have turned to wild-simulated cultivation to help conserve remaining wild populations, and meet market demand for high quality roots.

Need For Cultivation

Transitioning from wild-collection to cultivation is an important step to becoming a better steward and more profitable producer. Wild-harvesters spend many hours foraging the woods to find a marketable quantity of roots. By purchasing seeds or rootstock from a commercial source and planting them in a good location, a larger quantity of roots can be sustainably grown and harvested. Increasing prices and consumer demand has shown the need for more high quality materials on the market. These trends are creating a good opportunity for forest landowners to capture a piece of a multi-million dollar industry.



Cultivation Practices Influence Value

It's important to understand how cultivation practices can change the physical appearance of the final product. Before investing your time and money, it is important to research the existing market structures, and desired characteristics of the crops you want to produce.



American ginseng can be produced using three cultivation methods: Field-Cultivated, Woods-Cultivated, and Wild-Simulated. Field and Woods-Cultivated roots have a large and bulbous shape that makes them easily recognized as being intensively cultivated. Wild-simulated roots have a natural appearance and are virtually indistinguishable from truly wild roots. The value of wild looking roots is directly linked to consumer demand in Asia where 90% of all American ginseng is exported each year. By using wild-simulated techniques growers can produce roots that will allow them capture premium prices. To learn more about wild-simulated production, see the "publications" section below for additional resources.

Goldenseal is also grown by using the same three methods as ginseng. Goldenseal is usually processed into secondary products like powders, extracts, or salves, so the value has little to do with appearance. The value of goldenseal is determined by the more traditional market factors of supply and demand, and in some cases by the levels of medicinal alkaloids found in the root. Additional value can also be added to goldenseal crops by maintaining organic certification.

Marketing

Both American ginseng and goldenseal have ready-made markets and are sold to licensed buyers in your state. A list of buyers can be obtained from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife, or from your states ginseng management agency.

Wild-simulated American ginseng is the most profitable species currently being cultivated, and sells for \$350-\$500/Lb. dry weight. By law ginseng roots must be 5 years old to harvest and sell, but are most valuable after 7-10 years growth. American ginseng sales are fueled by consumer demand from China and other Asian countries where ginseng has been used medicinally for over 4,000 years. Based on current economic trends, markets for wild and wild-simulated ginseng roots have a promising future.



Goldenseal has been one of the most popular medicinal products since the 1970's, with around 250,000 lbs. of root harvested annually. Goldenseal is considered a mid-value species, and typically sells for \$20-\$40/Lb. dry weight, but has seen price increases in recent years. Goldenseal is commonly exported to Europe or sold domestically to buyers and processors. Although market prices may be lower than American ginseng, goldenseal can be harvested at more frequent intervals, typically after 3-4 years of growth, and can be produced in larger quantities when grown in a cultivated setting.

How Rural Action Can Help

Rural Action has been promoting forest botanical crops as a sustainable forestry alternative since 1994. We have helped hundreds of landowners get high quality resources and raw materials needed to start a forest botanical operation. By offering basic services of 1) Education, 2) Consultation, and 3) Planting Stock Sales, Rural Action can help you get started. Contact us with your questions, to find out about additional resources, or to purchase planting stock.

Publications

A series of five ginseng factsheets, co-authored by Rural Action and the Ohio State University Extension, are available online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu>. This series, titled "Growing American Ginseng In Ohio," includes : *An Introduction; Site Selection; Planting Using the Wild-Simulated Method; Maintenance, Disease Control and Pest Management; and Harvesting, Washing, and Drying.*

Detailed crop production guides for goldenseal and several other species, have been produced by the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research Center in North Carolina, and can be found online at <http://www.naturalmedicinesofnc.org/>.

