



GROWING GINSENG

Ginseng is grown from seeds, seedlings, or roots. Plants free from blight or mildew and growing spontaneously in woodland may be transplanted to prepared beds. Ginseng requires 5 to 7 years to mature from seed. By planting separate beds of seeds, 1-, 2-, and 3-year-old seedlings, and roots, the first crop can be harvested in 3 or 4 years after planting. Each year after the first harvest, another crop will come to maturity.

Seeds

Plant seeds in the spring, as soon as the soil can be tilled. Only scarified or partially germinated seeds should be used for planting. They are planted 8 inches apart each way in permanent beds or 2 by 6 inches apart in seedbeds. Cover seeds with 1 inch of forest soil or well-rotted hickory or basswood sawdust; do not use pine or oak sawdust. Seeds ripen in the fall, but generally do not germinate until the following fall. Do not allow ripe seeds to dry out. Store them in a cool, moist place. Use woodland soil, sand, loam, or sawdust as a storage medium. Use of seeds instead of seedlings may prevent the introduction of disease to new plantations. Also, this is the least expensive way to start a plantation, but requires a longer period until harvest. Some growers plant the seeds when they ripen in September and cover the beds with leaf mold or mulch. They keep the beds covered until spring when the seeds begin to sprout.

Seedlings

Ginseng seedlings are more expensive than seeds, but a crop grown from seedlings can be harvested 2 or 3 years sooner than a crop propagated from seeds. Several firms sell 1-, 2-, 3-year-old seedlings. Three-year-old seedlings produce seed during the first fall after planting which may be used for planting future crops. Set seedlings in permanent beds 8 inches apart each way. Closer spacing tends to increase disease in the plantation.

Roots

Roots may be set any time from October to April after soil has been tilled. Fall planting, however, is usually preferred. Plant roots 2 inches below the bed surface and 8 inches apart each way. When roots are not available in woodland, beginners should purchase them from reputable growers. Roots grow more rapidly when not permitted to seed.

Culture

Ginseng may be grown directly in woodlots or in lath sheds with partial shade - an environment similar to the plant's natural habitat. Plants thrive best in loamy soil such as found in oak and sugar maple forest in the North. Shade is essential.

Soil

Ginseng grows naturally on slopes of ravines and in well-drained sites where soil is formed from acid leaf mold of hardwood forests. The soil should be naturally dry and fairly light and in condition to grow good vegetables without the addition of strong manure. By proper treatment almost any fairly good soil can be conditioned for ginseng growing. The addition of woodland soil gives best results. Very sandy soil tends to produce hard, flinty roots of inferior quality. For seedbeds, break up soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches, and remove all weeds, grasses, and roots. Mix 1-to-1 with fiber-free woodland soil. If the soil is inclined to be heavy, add enough sand so that mixture will not harden after heavy rain.

