

Beds

Selection of proper location, preparation of soil, and good drainage are important in planting ginseng. The best site for beds is a hardwood forest with tall trees to provide reasonably dense shade and with little undergrowth. Similar drainage and shade conditions should be maintained when growing ginseng in lath sheds. Make beds 4 feet wide with walkways between them. For root planting, work the beds up to 12 inches deep. For seeds and seedlings, work the beds only 8 inches or so deep to prevent settling. Mound the center of permanent planting beds to provide space for more plants and, if located on flat ground, to facilitate good runoff of water. Slope the walkways so that they will drain water from the beds during heavy rains.

Shade

Ginseng needs three-fourths shade during the summer, and free circulation of air. The proper amount of shade can be provided in lath sheds or by trees in a forest planting. Laths should run north to south to provide alternating sun and shade to the plants. Do not use burlap or muslin; they interfere with air circulation.

Cultivation

Ginseng requires relatively little cultivation. The beds should be kept free of grass and weeds, and the soil should be scratched with a light implement whenever it shows signs of caking. One active person can easily take care of about 2 acres of ginseng.

Mulching

A winter mulch over the crowns is essential to prevent heaving by frost. A 4- or 5-inch layer is ample in the most severe climate; less is needed in the South. Spread mulch when frost is imminent, and remove it in the spring before the first shoots appear. Light mulching to retain moisture during dry weather is also advisable. Forest leaves or light brush, held in place with poultry netting, makes the best mulch. Cornstalks stripped of husks, bean vines, cowpea hay, and buckwheat straw are also suitable if they do not contain weeds, seeds, or other materials attractive to rodents.

Fertilizer

Many growers are opposed to excessive use of fertilizers. Heavy use of barnyard and chemical fertilizers lessens the resemblance of cultivated ginseng to the wild root. Overmanuring also forces growth and lowers the resistance of ginseng to the attacks of disease. Some growers fertilize with leaves or old sawdust of hardwood trees or with ground-up, rotted hardwood. Other prefer woodland soil or rotted leaves 4 to 6 inches deep spaded to a depth of about 8 inches with fine raw bonemeal well worked in and applied at the rate of 1 pound per square yard.

Protection

Fence beds to keep out animals and to discourage theft. Protect the beds from moles with boards or close mesh wire netting set 12 to 18 inches in the ground. Rodents may be controlled with traps.

Harvest

A ginseng crop matures in 5 to 7 years. Generally the roots are dug in mid-October of the sixth or seventh year. Good roots are about 4 inches long, 8 inch thick below the crown, and average 1 ounce in the fresh state. Older roots possess the most substance and when properly cured bring the highest prices.