

Digging

Dig the roots with their forks intact. Carefully free them of adhering soil so as to preserve their natural color and characteristic circular markings. Do not scrape or scrub them. The market value of the product is based, in part, on wholeness and appearance. Some growers replant young and undersized roots or heel them in until spring planting.

Drying

Dry the roots in a well-ventilated, heated room. Drying is usually started between 60° and 80°F., and after a few days the temperature is increased to 90°. Another method, adopted by some growers, is to start drying between 100° and 110°, and when roots wilt lower the temperature to 90°. Spread the roots thinly on lattice or wire-netting shelves. Turn them frequently, but handle with care to avoid marring the surface or breaking the forks. Roots more than 2 inches in diameter will need to be dried for about 6 weeks; smaller roots may be properly dried in less time. Throughout the curing process, especially during damp weather, care should be taken to see that the root does not mold or sour. Do not overheat, as it tends to discolor the surface and spoil the texture of the root. When well cured, the roots should be stored in a dry, airy, rodentproof place until ready for market.

Yield

The yield of cultivated ginseng depends on the condition under which the crop is grown and the experience and skill of the grower. The estimated weight of dried 6-year-old root from a bed 4 by 16 feet is 10 pounds. Yields of dried roots from a well-managed planting should average about 1 ton per acre, although greater yields are often reported. Crops from forest plantings are reported to be about half those obtained in lath sheds, but production costs are also much less. The value of the crop depends on the market at time of harvesting. There are several firms in the United States which buy ginseng. The market for ginseng root is limited. An estimated 95 percent of the ginseng collected or grown in the United States is exported to the Orient (e.g., 160,000 lb/yr in 1969-71). While the prices paid for ginseng are high, they fluctuate greatly (\$31-38/lb in 1969-71). High initial cost of planting stock, susceptibility to diseases, long maturing period, and a limited market indicate ginseng farming should be approached conservatively. Since yields of dried root average about 1 ton per acre, 100 to 200 acres of mature ginseng could easily supply the total market for 1 year.

Adapted by Willem van Eck from a 1978 USDA bulletin by Llewelyn Williams and James A. Duke (Farmers Bulletin 2201). For further information, contact your County Extension Agent or contact us at 293-2219 or 293-6258.