



American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*)

- American ginseng is a wild perennial plant that has become very rare in Canada—the harvest of wild American ginseng is considered unsustainable.
- American ginseng is an endangered species and is protected by law.
 - It is protected on federal lands under the *Species at Risk Act*.
 - The harvest, trade and cultivation of wild, wild-simulated and woods-grown American ginseng is prohibited under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007*.
 - In Quebec, under the *Loi sur les espèces menacées ou vulnérables*, harvest or trade of wild American ginseng is prohibited.
- The export of wild American ginseng is prohibited from Canada—only cultivated American ginseng can be legally traded in Canada.
- The export from Canada of cultivated ginseng requires a Canadian CITES export permit.

Situation

When American ginseng was first discovered growing in North America in 1715, it set off a lucrative trade business and rapidly became the second most important Canadian export after fur. The roots of ginseng had been used for centuries in traditional Asian medicine, and it was in high demand. Ginseng is still used by many people today in the practice of traditional medicine.

Unfortunately, this wild perennial plant has become very rare in Canada, and the harvest of wild American ginseng is now considered unsustainable. Very few viable populations remain in Canada; even low levels of harvest and poaching pose a real threat to its survival because of its slow growth and low rate of reproduction in the wild. American ginseng plants are long-lived but can take three to eight years to reach maturity and begin flowering.

In Canada, wild American ginseng is found only in southern Ontario and Quebec. Over-harvesting, poaching and habitat destruction have led to its being listed as nationally endangered (*Species at Risk Act*), provincially endangered in Ontario (highest risk category, *Endangered Species Act, 2007*), and threatened in Quebec (highest risk category, *Loi sur les espèces menacées ou vulnérables*).

For this reason, the harvest, import and export of American ginseng in Canada today is regulated and carefully monitored. **Only cultivated American ginseng can be legally traded in Canada.** Even the possession of wild American ginseng collected in Canada is prohibited, and the export of wild American ginseng from Canada is also prohibited. However, wild or cultivated American ginseng legally imported from the U.S. can still be legally traded.

Photo: Brenda Buchart © Environment Canada



What is the law?

The export of wild American ginseng is prohibited from Canada. Only cultivated ginseng may be authorized for export when conditions are met. The export from Canada of cultivated ginseng requires a Canadian CITES ([Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#)) export [permit](#) issued by Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service. Permits are issued for personal or commercial purposes. There is no exemption for American ginseng purchased by tourists, and a CITES export permit is required to bring any amount of American ginseng home.

The requirements for CITES permits apply to whole or sliced roots and parts of roots, whether fresh or dried. As the roots require permits, whole plants with roots, live or dead, require permits as well. A CITES export permit is not required for exporting ginseng seeds, or manufactured parts or derivatives of ginseng such as powders, pills, extracts, tonics, teas and confectionery. For more information you can refer to the [Notice for Exporters of North American Ginseng from Canada](#) on www.ec.gc.ca/CITES.

American Ginseng	Requirements	Applicable Laws
Harvested from the wild in Canada	Harvest, possession, sale: Prohibited and illegal International and interprovincial trade: Prohibited and illegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species at Risk Act • WAPPRIITA/CITES • Provincial legislation
Cultivated	Export from Canada: Canadian CITES Export Permit Harvest, possession, sale – Ontario: Prohibited and illegal unless the American ginseng is cultivated on land in respect of which license fees are payable to the Ontario Ginseng Growers Association without the use of any material such as seeds, roots or cuttings, taken from the wild in Ontario on or after June 30, 2008; and cultivated using structures that produce artificial shade. International trade: Legal to trade within provinces and to export from provinces within Canada, if legally acquired, in accordance with provincial laws.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WAPPRIITA/CITES • Provincial legislation



What you can do!

You can help protect this Canadian species at risk by avoiding contributing to its illegal harvest from the wild and its trafficking.

If you own or operate a pharmacy, or sell herbal plants or animal parts, or medicines that contain wildlife derivatives, you must ensure there are no illegal parts of American ginseng in the ingredients in any of the medicines in your store. You may sell cultivated American ginseng from Canada (live plants and whole or sliced roots and parts of roots), but make sure you know the name of the company or wholesaler where it was obtained. If you sell wild or cultivated American ginseng imported from another country, ask the importer to give you a copy of the CITES export [permits](#). Your store may be inspected by Environment Canada, so keep a record to prove the American ginseng roots were legally obtained.

If you import or export herbs or medicines containing wildlife parts or derivatives that include American ginseng roots, whole or sliced roots or parts of roots, be sure that none of the ginseng is from wild harvested plants from Canada or from cultivated plants from Ontario that do not meet Ontario legal requirements. If you import cultivated or wild American ginseng from the U.S. or export cultivated American ginseng from Canada, you must first obtain the necessary CITES [permits](#) and present them to the Canada Border Services Agency upon entry to and exit from Canada.

If you are a customer or user of traditional herbs and medicines, you must only buy products that have been grown and/or imported legally. Ask the store owner for proof of legal import/export or purchase. If you travel with medicines, make sure you have all the required [permits](#) before leaving or entering Canada with live American ginseng plants and whole or sliced roots or parts of roots. American ginseng that is native to Canada or the U.S., even if it is returned after being shipped to Asia, is not exempt for live plants, whole or sliced roots and parts of roots, and needs a re-export permit.



Photo: Brenda Buchart © Environment Canada



What happens if you do not comply with the law?

The goods will be seized, and you may receive a warning or a ticket, or fines of up to \$150,000 and/or five years in jail for individuals, and fines of up to \$300,000 for businesses. A separate fine can be imposed for every illegal item. For instance, an individual could be charged for every box of a product containing endangered species parts or derivatives. Serious offences may be subject to a broader range of penalties and higher fines.



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For more information on [American ginseng](#), please visit Environment Canada's [CITES](#) website.

For more information on how and where to apply for a CITES [permit](#), contact Environment Canada at cites@ec.gc.ca

or

Management Authority
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
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