GINSENG, AMERICAN

Panax quinquefolius
[PAN-aks kwin-kway-FOH-lee-us]

Family: Araliaceae

Names: man root, life root, root of immortality, Tartar root, red berry, heal-all 'seng, 'sang, wonder of the world root, Amerikaanse Ginseng, Amerikanischer Ginseng; xi yang shen (Chinese)

Description: One main stem supports a few side stems bearing leaf clusters. It has a height of 1-2 feet and a width of 1 foot. The flowers are many and green-white. The leaves are thin, green, leaflets divided usually in clusters of 4-5. The root is a fleshy, white taproot, up to 1 inch in diameter, with appendages that often have an uncanny, manlike appearance. A heel on the root indicates where stems from previous years grew. The fruit is bright red, hanging berries ½ to 1 inch in diameter, containing 2 seeds and it blooms from May to June.

Cultivation: A perennial to Zone 3-4. Prefers a moist, well-drained rich soil with a pH of 5-6 in shade with ample warmth and humidity during the growing season. Propagate by seed sown in spring. Ginseng requires approximately 75% shade. Ginseng can be grown in the woods or under shade cloth. Sunlight encourages root growth, although too much will kill it. Germination is slow and erratic up to 12-18 months. The seeds must be scored with a razor, then stratified 8 months in moist sand. Space 2 feet apart. Woods grown ginseng receives a much higher price but there are a number of difficulties including planting fewer plants per acre and deer and other pests eating the plant and berries. Use slow release fertilizer and compost. Mulch also helps. In dry areas it must be irrigated once or twice a week with overhead sprinklers to help raise the humidity. Because of its susceptibility to disease, fungicides are used for control. Roots are lifted from 6-7 year old plants in autumn and used fresh or dried in decoctions, liquid extracts, pills and powders. The age is determined by counting the nodes on top of the root left from previous stalks. The older larger roots are preferred. Ginseng root is washed thoroughly after digging and then put out to dry. The important thing is to dry it slowly to keep the root from darkening. Roots are about 70% water.

History: The American Indians learned about ginseng from the Jesuits and used it to combat fatigue, stimulate appetite, and aid digestion. Some tribes mixed it into love potions. The native Americans considered the root sacred. The Iroquois named it Garent-Oquen, or man’s thighs and legs separated.” It was a talisman for warriors and given to them to treat “old year’s fire.” The Cherokee, who call it yunwiya usdi, or “little men,” consider it one of their most sacred herbs and add it to many
American’s 19th-century Eclectics called ginseng a stimulant for “mental exhaustion from overwork” and prescribed it for loss of appetite, indigestion, asthma, laryngitis, bronchitis and tuberculosis.

The first successful United States ginseng crop reported in an 1895 New York paper sparked interesting in cultivating ginseng and the Department of Agriculture printed a bulletin on growing ginseng.

Pan is Latin for “all” and akos means “remedy”.

**Constituents:** Saponins (ginsenosides), sterols, vitamins (B1, B2, B12, choline), minerals (zinc, copper, magnesium, calcium, iron, manganese)

**Properties:** a bittersweet, tonic herb, adaptogenic. Chi and yin tonic, demulcent, rejuvenative

**Energetics:** sweet, bitter, neutral

**Meridians/Organs affected:** spleen, lungs

**Medicinal Uses:** Similar to Panax ginseng only milder

**Research:**
A number of studies conducted by scientists at the University of Toronto verified ginseng’s ability to smooth out the after-meal blood sugar spikes that type 2 diabetics experience. Ginseng doses from 1-3 grams work equally well, with the best blood sugar lowering effect was from taking the herb 40 minutes before the meal. A dose of 1 gram taken 40 minutes before each meal would work well for pre-diabetic people.

**Tincture:** take as a tonic or combine with herbs such as elecampane and mulberry bark for chronic coughs and weak lungs

**Powder:** Use in capsules or tablets in 1-2 g doses for yin deficiency

**Toxicity:** Large doses may cause depression, insomnia, nervousness, high blood pressure, and possibly hyperactivity.

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**Recipes:**

**American Ginseng Liqueur**
25-30 grams (1 oz) American ginseng
1 2-inch stick cinnamon
1 1-inch piece fresh ginger, sliced
3 Tbsp honey
2 cups vodka or gin

Put a pint canning jar or other lidded glass container and its lid in a sink or large bowl. Pour on boiling water to cover, and let it sit for 5 minutes. Use tongs to transfer the jar to a clean kitchen towel. When cool enough to handle, pack the jar with the ginseng. Add the cinnamon, ginger, and honey. Pour in the vodka or gin. Remove the lid from the hot water. Use a clean towel to close it tightly without forcing. Shake the jar a few times to distribute the ingredients. Label and date the jar, and store it in a cool, dark place for 2-4 months for flavors to develop. To serve, strain the liqueur through a fine strainer or cheesecloth. Drink about a half ounce at a time, as a shot or in hot water. (Tonics)

**Strength and Stamina Ginseng Cordial**
2 parts panax ginseng root
2 parts white American ginseng root
2 parts Siberian ginseng root
2 parts hawthorn berries
1 part rose hips
1 part lemon verbena leaves
1 part sarsaparilla root
brandy

Chop the fresh herbs, fruits, and berries. Grind herbs. Place all ingredients in a widemouthed glass jar. Cover with 3 times as much vodka or brandy. Cover the jar; store at room temperature away fro direct light and heat. Shake daily for 2-4 weeks. Strain well, squeezing as much liquid as possible out of the steeped herbs. Compost the herbs and rebottle the cordial. Sweeten cordial lightly with ¼-1/2 cup honey, molasses, or maple syrup per quart of cordial.

Enjoy ½-1 tsp 1 hour before workouts. (Healing Tonics)
**Ritual Uses:** Gender: Masculine. Planet: Sun. Element: Fire. Powers: Love, Wishes, Healing, Beauty, Protection, Lust. The root is carried to attract love, as well as to guard one's health, to draw money, and to ensure sexual potency. Ginseng will also bring beauty to all who carry it. Burn ginseng to ward off evil spirits and to break hexes and curses. A tea so ginseng is used as a powerful lust-inducing drink, whether alone or with other like herbs. Hold a ginseng root in your hands, visualizing your wish into the root, and throw it into running water. Or carve your wish into the root and throw it into the water. Ginseng can be a substitute for mandrake root.

**Resources:**
Companion Plants, [http://www.crimson-sage.com](http://www.crimson-sage.com) Plants
Richters, [www.richters.com](http://www.richters.com) seeds, dried root

**References:**

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