



Rare Plants of New Hampshire

Ginseng

Panax quinquefolium L.

Ginseng family (Araliaceae)

What Does It Look Like?

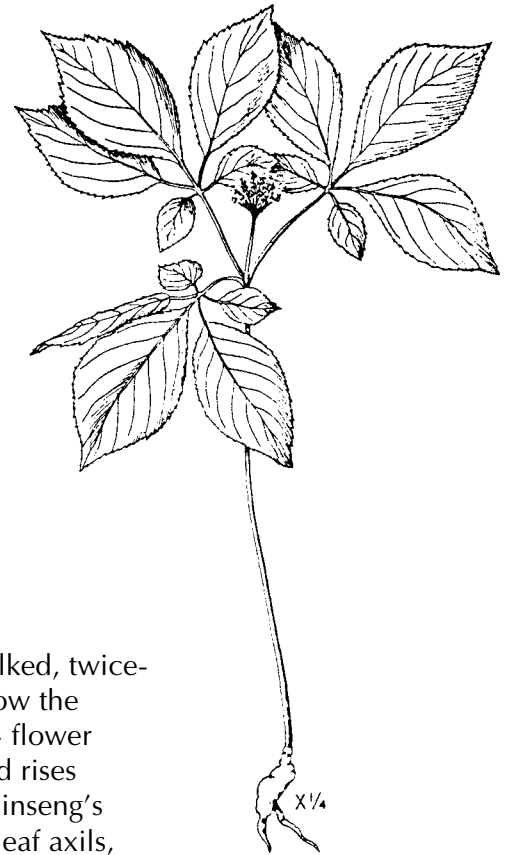
This woodland plant is a perennial herb with an unbranched stem up to 50 cm (20 inches) tall, rising from a forking, root-like underground stem.

Leaves: A single whorl of 1-5 (usually 3) leaves, each one palmately compound with 5-7 (rarely 3) serrate, pear-shaped leaflets that end in a narrow point.

Flower: A single flower stalk, 1-12 cm (0.5-4.5 inches) long, rises from where the leaf bases join together. The tiny flowers are greenish-white and grouped in a spherical cluster. It flowers in July.

Fruit: A cluster of bright red berries.

Similar species: Wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) has long stalked, twice-compound leaves (a separate pair of leaflets below the terminal triplet). The flower stalk usually has 2-4 flower clusters (which produce nearly black berries) and rises separately from the mostly underground stem. Ginseng's flower cluster rises well above ground from the leaf axils, and it has red berries.

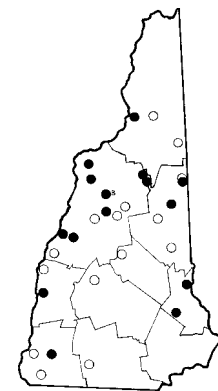


Where Is It Found?

Habitat: Across its range, ginseng grows in rich, rocky woods. In New Hampshire, it occurs primarily in rich and semi-rich mesic forests and talus forest/woodlands, often in rocky colluvial soils with a thick layer of humus.

Associated species: Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*), wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*), zig-zag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*), squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*), blue cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*).

Distribution: Quebec to Minnesota, south to Georgia.



Ginseng in New Hampshire
○ Historic Locations
● Verified since 1980



What Is Its Status?

Conservation

status:

This plant is uncommon and local throughout its distribution. Many populations are apparently stable elsewhere, but it is state listed as threatened in New Hampshire because of its rarity and collection pressure. Although thirty-two occurrences of ginseng are recorded for the state, only seventeen of these have been confirmed since 1980. Few sites in New Hampshire or New England have more than 80 plants. Collection pressure for commercial trade purposes has increased rarity at historic sites. Winters with poor snow cover and deep freezes can be detrimental to ginseng populations.

Management:

As a plant that is adapted to forest ecosystems, ginseng may not respond well to significant canopy removals. Canopy removals generally increase light, temperature, and nutrient availability and decrease moisture levels, conditions which generally favor more competitive species. If harvesting is necessary, single tree selection is likely to have less impact than clear cutting.

What Should You Do If You Find This Plant?

Please report sightings of this or other rare species to the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory. Documentation should include: (1) location of the sighting on USGS topographic map or road map, with written directions for relocating the plant; (2) a photo of the plant; and (3) descriptive information including how many plants there are, whether any plants are flowering or fruiting, and comments about the surrounding vegetation. Information may be sent to NHHI/DRED, PO Box 1856, Concord, NH 03302-1856. If you have any questions, please call the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory Program at (603) 271-3623.

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