



Maine Department of Conservation
Natural Areas Program

Panax quinquefolius L.

American Ginseng

- Habitat:** Rich, shady northern hardwood forests.
[Hardwood to mixed forest (forest, upland)]
- Range:** Eastern North America, south to northern Florida and occasionally west to Manitoba. Primarily a species of the Appalachian hardwood forests.
- Phenology:** Herbaceous perennial; flowers in June, fruits ripen in September.
- Family:** Apiaceae

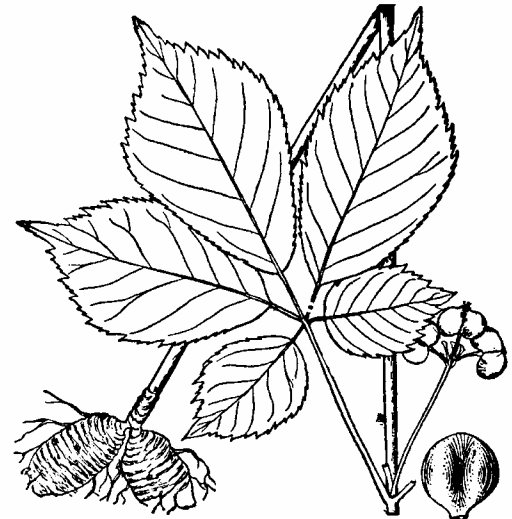


Illustration from Britton & Brown's Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada, 2nd ed.

Aids to Identification: Ginseng is a fleshy-rooted herb that grows about 25 cm high and bears several palmately compound leaves at the top of the stem. The five leaflets are elongate-oval in shape, with the lowermost two smaller than the upper three. The small, yellowish-green flowers are borne in an umbel on a short stalk above the leaves, and develop into bright red berries. Ginseng is most likely to be confused with its close relative, wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*), which is present in almost any upland woods in Maine. Wild sarsaparilla also has five leaflets, but these are pinnately arranged, i.e., the lowest two are separated from the upper three, and its flowers are borne on a leafless stem.

Ecological characteristics: Ginseng occurs in rich hardwood forests where the soils are locally enriched with nutrients. Sugar maple, yellow birch, and white ash are the most common tree associates; basswood often occurs and can be a good indicator species. Ginseng often occurs at the base of rock outcrops or hillslopes, where nutrient-rich colluvium has collected. Herbaceous plants often growing with ginseng include Goldie's fern (*Dryopteris goldiana*), silvery spleenwort (*Deparia acrostichoides*), and blue cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*). The plant does not spread vegetatively, and most known ginseng populations in Maine consist of fewer than a dozen plants.

Synonyms:

Rarity of *Panax quinquefolius*

State Rank:	S2	Imperiled in Maine because of rarity or vulnerability to further decline.
New England Rank:	None	
Global Rank:	G3G4	Possibly rare globally..

Status of *Panax quinquefolius*

Federal Status:	None	No Federal Status.
State Status:	Endangered	
Proposed State Status:	Endangered	Rare and in danger of being lost from the state in the foreseeable future; or federally listed as Endangered. Listing criteria met: Few individuals, Special habitat, At edge of range, Declining populations, Vulnerable to human activity

Known Distribution in Maine:



- ▲ Historical (before 1982)
- Recent (1982 - present)

This rare plant has been documented from a total of 29 town(s) in the following county(ies): Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, York.

Dates of documented observations are: 1878, 1895, 1896, 1907, 1910, 1912, 1922, 1923, 1930, 1980, 1982, 1985 (2), 1986, 1989, 1990 (2), 1991, 1992 (2), 1993 (3), 1995, 1996 (3), 1997 (2), 1999 (2), 2000 (4), 2001 (2), 2002 (3)

Reason(s) for rarity:

Naturally rare because it is near the northern limit of its range, and there is scarcity of suitable forest microhabitat. Several sites have declined or disappeared due either to harvesting the plants for their roots, or to heavy cutting of the forest habitat.

Conservation considerations:

Recent interest in ginseng as a cash crop may lead to woodland plantings of this species. All planted populations should be carefully documented so as not to be confused with native populations in the future. Natural Maine populations are not large or vigorous enough to sustain harvesting.

The information in this fact sheet was downloaded from the Natural Areas Program's Biological and Conservation Database on 13 May 2004. We are grateful to our Botanical Advisory Group for additional information on particular species, and in particular, to Arthur Haines for his assistance with identifying characteristics and taxonomic questions. Nomenclature follows Haines and Vining's *Flora of Maine* (V.F. Thomas Press, 1998); where older works refer to a plant by another name, it is given under "Synonyms". The Natural Areas Program, within the Department of Conservation, maintains the most comprehensive source of information on Maine's rare or endangered plants and rare or exemplary natural communities, and is a member of the Association for Biodiversity Information.

If you know of locations for this plant or would like more information on this species, please contact the Natural Areas Program
State House Station 93, Augusta, Maine 04333; telephone (207) 287-8044.

