Historic Plantings in British Columbia

The recent plantings of ginseng in British Columbia were not the first. There is historical evidence of a planting in Vancouver in 1922 of 1/2 acre, but the article does not mention the species. A planting was also reported to be in Revelstoke at the time of the CPR railroad construction, though this is only word of mouth. This planting was probably Asian ginseng from seeds brought here by the Chinese labourers. Another planting near Vernon in the 30s is also word of mouth but the description fits the process of growing ginseng. Another word of mouth with no real confirmation, is a planting near Cherryville. A fourth word of mouth was a planting just north of Sidney on Vancouver Island (late 20s or early 30s). See Letters, page 12, in the Jan/Feb 1995 issue of *Canadian Geographic*. The last historical ginseng we are aware of was a small planting of American ginseng at Glade, British Columbia, a woods grown garden and it was there in 1982 when the recent activity in this commodity was started. There was also a substantial amount of ginseng grown in Washington State up until the second world war when it totally disappeared.

Recent Plantings in British Columbia

In the fall of 1982 the first commercial planting of American ginseng *Panax quinquefolius* L. was undertaken in British Columbia. This was done after five years of research into the crop's cultural requirements by John Latta, then of Chai-Na-Ta Ginseng Co. Since that time the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries has been able to observe the crop growing and has obtained first hand information. The purpose of this production guide is to provide you with the basic cultural information required to grow ginseng to a harvestable stage as well as some other information about the production of ginseng.

British Columbia Statistics

What started in British Columbia in 1982 as five acres and one grower expanded to 3000 acres and 130 growers by 1996. Today (2003) there are approximately 1,700 acres and 40 growers of ginseng. These growers consist of small part time individuals to large corporations listed on the stock markets. Ginseng production requires a large financial commitment, high labour inputs, and a requirement for good management skills, but can give growers fair financial returns on their investments.

Use of Ginseng

Ginseng is used mainly by people of the South East Asian Pacific Rim countries, although it is gaining some popularity here and in other countries. The use of Asian ginseng goes back 3,000 years or more in China where it is considered the most important herb in their traditional medicine. American ginseng has been shipped from North America to Asia since 1716 when it was discovered near Montreal. It is called the "elixir of life" and if taken regularly is said to reduce stress, increase physical stamina, quiet the nerves, enhance blood flow, help in the control of blood sugar and cholesterol levels, help regulate blood pressure, strengthen the metabolism, stimulate the immune system, vitalize glandular functions, slow the degeneration of cells and increase longevity.

Because of the long list of benefits derived from consuming ginseng it is said, by herbalists and scientists, to be an adaptogen, a plant that helps you 'adapt' to the stresses of life. It is one of a few plants given this title. Some common ones are American ginseng, Asian ginseng, Siberian ginseng, and roseroot.

The name *Panax* means a cure-all or all-healing, a panacea, and Asian ginseng (originally jenshen) means man-essence or man-like; both names relating to its unique attributes. According to Asian literature, ginseng has no properties that are considered aphrodisiac in nature but, as the story goes, if you are healthier because of consuming ginseng you probably have more tendencies towards sexual activity.

> ***Note:*** *The above claims are not recognized by the Canadian Medical Association nor are they recommendations of the authors.*

Ginseng is available as whole root, capsules and tablets, tinctures, slices or powdered forms, to name a few and is used in tea, soups, candies, gum, as capsules or tablets or may be chewed in small pieces. In China a large percentage of ginseng root is sliced very thin and used in various ways. The Asian consumer prefers to purchase ginseng as a whole root product or a recognizable form, then have it prepared so they know what they are getting. It is the most widely used medicinal herb in the South East Asian Pacific Rim countries. There are two main varieties of ginseng and although both varieties have many similar qualities they are considered to have differing effects — the North America ginseng giving a cooling or depressant effect and the South East Asia variety a warming or stimulating effect. Opinions vary but many consider the North American variety to be the

overall superior variety. The active ingredients are a group of closely related saponins called ginsenocides which are produced by and stored in the plant. The difference in effect of the two species are reportedly due to the different allocation of the ginsenocides from one species to the other.

In North America, American ginseng was used by most if not all of the indigenous populations in areas where it grew and as well, was traded to other tribes for other commodities. It was used for much the same reasons in North America as it was in South East Asia.

Wild ginseng, of both species is quite rare and American ginseng is on the endangered species list in North America and Asian ginseng is a protected species in South East Asia.

The Associated Ginseng Growers of British Columbia

In 1985, the Associated Ginseng Growers of British Columbia (TAGG) was formed to enhance the ginseng industry here in British Columbia They hold an annual meeting and seminars each year for their members, as well as supporting a research garden at the Summerland research station, to support the British Columbia Agriculture Council and with the registration of pesticides for pest control on ginseng. They can be contacted at Box 241, Vernon, British Columbia, V1T 6M2.

Other Useful Publications

*Major Insect and Allied Pests of Vegetables in British Columbia**

Weed Control — An Introductory Manual

*Field Guide to Noxious and Other Selected Weeds of British Columbia***

*British Columbia Sprinkler Irrigation Manual****

Rodent Control on Agricultural Land in British Columbia

Bird Control for Agricultural Lands in British Columbia

* *available for a fee from Crown Publications, 521 Fort Street, Victoria, British Columbia, V8W 1E7*

** *available free to growers*
*** *available for a fee from irrigation dealers*

Panax on Internet

The University College of the Cariboo in Kamloops and the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries have jointly started a ginseng discussion group on the Internet system. You have to have a computer with a modem in order to access the group. If you do, you might consider signing on and 'listening' or participating. You also have to have an internet server in your area or be on a system like most governments and larger corporations are. This you will have to determine in your local area. The instructions for signing on and off are in the appendix, page 141.

There are subscribers from various locations throughout the world. It is a good format to 'talk' about ginseng and its many complexities with other people in the industry. See you on the Internet!

Regulated Movement of Ginseng

Since wild ginseng is classed as an endangered species the following regulations apply to it. See a photocopy of the CITES form in the appendix of this guide, page 142.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement which regulates trade in a number of species of animals and plants, their parts and derivatives, and any articles made from them. The Convention is applied in Canada in accordance with a General Export Permit and a General Import Permit made under the Export Regulations and the Import Regulations, respectively, of the *Export and Import Permits Act*.

This lists of CITES regulated species is an extract from both the:

Export Control List, amendment P.C. 1995-758 (SOR/95-236), dated May 9, 1995.

Import Control List, amendment P.C. 1995-757 (SOR/95-235), dated May 9, 1995.

Published in the *Canada Gazette*, Part II, Volume 129, No. 11, dated May 31, 1995.

The *Export and Import Permits Act Handbook* may be purchased from:

Publishing Centre
Supply and Services Canada
45 Sacre-Coeur Boulevard
HULL, QUEBEC K1A 0S9