

## Forest botanicals: Lessons rooted in history

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Native, perennial forest botanicals, like American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) and goldenseal (*Hydrastis Canadensis*), are deeply rooted in Appalachia's history and intricately woven into the fabric of our culture. Often overlooked in history books, you might be surprised to learn that alongside the fur trade, ginseng was a major export of colonial America. The international trade of this economically important herb in the United States dates back to the mid-1700s, with famous early Americans like Daniel Boone. In 1784, nearly 30 tons of wild American ginseng from the southern Appalachians set sail for China. The rush for "green gold" ignited.

Harvesting wild ginseng helped many early pioneers settle their homesteads, paid for necessities during hard times, and even helped families survive the aftermath of the Civil War. By the late 1800s, however, overharvesting and habitat loss had taken its toll on wild ginseng populations and exports declined significantly. In the 1970s, under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services began controlling wild ginseng and goldenseal root harvest and trade to prevent further decline. Today, other forest botanicals, including bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*), blue cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) and more, are now considered "at-risk" by United Plant Savers.

The ginseng culture has been passed down for generations in Appalachia, and a new wave of "forest farmers" are sustainably stewarding and cultivating forest botanicals in the understory. Whether growing in beds under a woods cultivated system or mimicking natural growth habits in a wild simulated planting, forest farming brings a beacon of hope for the sustainable future of these native, at-risk botanicals and offers an income opportunity in your forest understory.

As we approach the start of wild ginseng harvest season in Virginia and Tennessee (Sept. 1 – Dec. 31), pay homage to the importance of ginseng and other forest botanicals to our nation's history. By keeping this historically significant culture alive, we have the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of our forefathers and ensure these cherished medicinal plants are here for generations to come. Here are some simple steps you can take to dig sustainably and consciously: Start a forest farm, get permission to dig legally, harvest only mature plants after seed production, plant back seeds and pieces of budding rhizomes, harvest less than 20% of any given patch, rotate harvest sites, and encourage others to do the same!

Source: [https://www.heraldcourier.com/lifestyles/agriculture/commender-forest-botanicals-lessons-rooted-in-history/article\\_11b9375c-ebf4-53e5-af28-0296c0a0e9a5.html](https://www.heraldcourier.com/lifestyles/agriculture/commender-forest-botanicals-lessons-rooted-in-history/article_11b9375c-ebf4-53e5-af28-0296c0a0e9a5.html)