

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE SEED EXCHANGE®

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GINSENG CULTURE

Checking Soil Requirements

Ginseng requires a well-drained soil, which means a steep to moderate slope. Too much standing water will generate diseases and cause the roots to rot. Creating terraces by taking downed lumber and putting it on the up-hill side will create a flatter area to plant but will not cause the water to stand. These terraces are desirable for keeping the soil from eroding. One of the most important elements for good ginseng growth is the soil. I consider myself a convert of Dr. Elaine Ingham from Oregon State University, author of the "Soil Foods Web" concept. To simplify here, soil in the woods and soil in the sun garden are different. Woods-soil is made at my farm from 75% bark mulch that has been composted and 25% veggie compost (which can also be horse, chicken, turkey manure or worm castings). I would like to use hardwood mulch but pine bark mulched compost is all I can get. This will give you a dark, moist medium in which to plant the seeds or roots.

Planting - seeds

Plant the seeds as soon as possible after receiving them. If planting must be delayed, never allow the seeds to dry out. They should be kept cool and damp, but not wet. For longer storage use a plastic bucket in a cool basement, with a damp cloth on top of the seeds, covered with a lid.

September through October is the best time to plant, just before the leaves come down. Density of planting is very important. There needs to be space enough to ensure airflow, to reduce competition for moisture, nutrients and sunlight, and to help control the spread of disease. Plant seed approximately one-half inch deep. Space seed one to six inches apart, in rows six to nine inches apart. In a mixed bed with other companion plants and ferns, a minimum of 1-1/2 feet between plants is needed, and three to five feet is recommended.

Planting - roots

Plant the roots as soon as possible after receiving them. If they need to be held for only a day or two, put them in plastic bags in the refrigerator. Open the bags daily to aerate, check for mold and add a few drops of water if they start to feel dry. For longer temporary storage, cover the roots with four to six inches of damp peat or soil in a container and store in a cool place.

Plant roots at an angle (30 to 45 degrees from the vertical) in well prepared soil with the bud just below the soil surface. Plant three to twelve inches apart in rows six to twelve inches apart. Mulch the same as seeded beds.

Mulching

Mulching is an important step which provides protection for the plants. Leaves make a good natural mulch, helping to retain moisture and keeping the soil cool. In addition, since mulch is constantly decaying, it leaves a natural fertilizer in the soil. Mulch should be applied to the beds immediately after planting.

Pest Control

The best way to control pests and disease is through growing healthy plants.

Healthy plants need great soil. Much of the topsoil in the mountains is at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Plant diseases caused by fungi are one of the primary limitations to ginseng production. The fungi are borne by soil, air, and water. Today's prevention is by spacing and proper drainage. New studies indicate that sprays made from either Horsetail in the spring or Goldenseal in the fall can help with fungal problems. In certain areas deer, wild turkey, livestock, ground squirrels, squirrels, voles, mice, and slugs can be a problem. However, all of these have management solutions.

Adapted from:

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Care and Planting of Ginseng Seed and Roots, Revised 3/02, Jeanine M. Davis, Extension Horticultural Specialist, Department of Horticultural Science, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, North Carolina State University