

American Ginseng and Timber Harvest

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Timber harvest is a common disturbance that is important due to its ongoing, cyclical nature and its direct effects on forest canopy structure. Most of the research regarding logging has focused on the study of trees, with less emphasis placed on the incredibly diverse herbaceous understory. American ginseng is an understory herb native to eastern North American deciduous forests. Due to the high demand for its root on the Asian market, ginseng is the premier medicinal non-timber forest product in the United States. Historic accounts suggest that ginseng was once far more abundant than it is today, and while over harvesting of ginseng for its root is often described as the primary cause of reductions in population size, extensive changes in ginseng habitat caused by historic wide-spread clearcut logging likely played a role in its decline.



For more information, please view [the webinar](#) featuring Drs. James McGraw and Jennifer Chandler. Dr. McGraw is a leading expert in native plants of eastern deciduous forests, particularly American ginseng. He believes firmly that scientists must reach beyond the Ivory Tower to explain what they do, and why. Dr. Chandler's research has focused primarily on plant response to discrete and chronic disturbances, including the response of American ginseng to both natural and man-made canopy disturbances.



MANAGEMENT

Ginseng grows best in mature forests with large trees, small canopy gaps, and well-developed soils. Disturbances such as lightning strikes, small-scale windthrow, disturbance-based silviculture, and ice storms all promote the growth and productivity of ginseng without causing detrimental population effects.

Ginseng-harboring cove forests can be managed using silvicultural approaches that mimic natural disturbance patterns such as intermediate treatments (e.g. thinnings) and uneven-aged selection regeneration treatments (e.g. single tree selections). This management approach creates small canopy gaps that encourage the growth of American ginseng and other shade-intermediate species. Harvesting should limit disturbance to the forest understory and when available, more site sensitive harvesting equipment and approaches that reduce ground impacts are preferred.