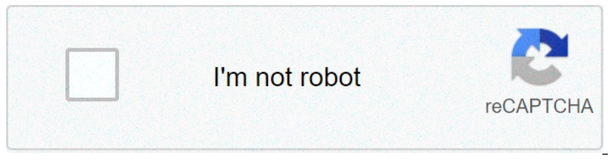

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How much ginseng can you grow per acre

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Apparently the Chinese people prefer wild ginseng over cultivated because it more closely resembles the revered wild Oriental Ginseng (Panax ginseng). The Chinese believe that the slower-growing wild roots, which are harvested at an older age, absorb more curative power from the forest floor. Anyone who knows ginseng can easily tell the difference between wild and cultivated roots. The wild roots are dark tan in color, gnarled in appearance and show many concentric growth rings. Wild roots are generally small in size and light in weight. The cultivated roots are cream colored, smooth and fat, and exhibit few concentric growth rings. Cultivated roots are often large and heavy. The Oriental buyers have quite an elaborate grading system for the dried roots they purchase. Intensive Cultivation Approximately 3,800 acres of ginseng are grown in intense cultivation under artificial shade in Wisconsin. Under intense cultivation the roots grow quickly to a harvestable size. Four year old roots are very commonly harvested. Yields as high as 2,500 pounds of dried root per acre have been reported. Establishment costs for one acre of ginseng beds, under wood lath shade or under polypropylene shade cloth, varies from $20,000 to $30,000 depending upon the current prices of materials needed. The greatest problem associated with intensely cultivated ginseng is disease, including alternaria blight, damping off and phytophthora. Any disease outbreaks severely threaten ginseng under intense cultivation because the plants are so close together that the disease can spread quickly through the entire bed. This intense fungus disease pressure forces artificial shade growers to use a vigorous fungicide spray schedule to prevent losses. Wild-Simulated A method called wild-simulated cultivation can be used to grow ginseng without fungicide sprays and expensive establishment costs. The prices paid for ginseng grown under wild-simulated cultivation are normally the same as prices paid for wild ginseng roots. While ginseng growing is very risky, wild-simulated ginseng cultivation can potentially provide supplemental income for persons who have patience, perseverance and discretion. To grow wild-simulated ginseng, the first step is site selection. The most favorable temperature and soil moisture conditions generally are associated with north or east facing slopes with at least a 75 per cent shade canopy. The best shade is provided by deep rooted, deciduous trees such as poplars and oaks. Ginseng grows best in a moist, well drained soil. Successful growth of ginseng most often occurs in sites where herbaceous woodland plants such as Jack-in the-pulpit, bloodroot, Solomon's seal and ferns are growing. If no herbaceous plants are growing on the forest door, ginseng will probably not grow there. Excellent soil drainage is essential. In the wild-simulated method, stratified ginseng seed is planted in the fall when the trees lose their leaves. In some locations, clearing of undergrowth will be necessary. If the site is sufficiently shaded, there should not be a great deal of competitive weed growth. This is an extensive (as opposed to intensive) planting method. If dense patches of weeds exist on the site, simply avoid them and plant in other areas. It is desirable to disturb the site as little as possible to reduce the spread of fungus diseases. The only tools needed to plant wild-simulated ginseng are a rake and a garden hoe. It is a good idea to plant seeds in defined beds that are 5 feet wide and 50 feet long. The beds should be separated by three foot wide walkways. The beds should run up and down the slope rather than across the slope for better air drainage around the plants. Rake the leaves on the forest floor away from the bed right down to the topsoil. Using the hoe, make three narrow furrows 13 inches apart, all the way down the length of the bed. Plant ginseng seeds, by hand, three inches apart in each furrow About one ounce or 500 seeds will be needed to plant three furrows at this spacing in a bed that is 5 feet wide and 50 feet long . Cover the seeds with 3/4 inch of soil. After planting, carefully step down each row to firm the soil around the seeds. To finish the planting, rake one inch of leaves back over the bed as a mulch. After a couple of rain storms, no one will be able to detect that any planting has occurred. The site will look completely natural. The stratified seed will germinate the next spring. The plants will look like three small strawberry leaves on a stem about one inch tall. Some of the ginseng seeds will not germinate and some will be eaten by rodents. Over the next seven years, the plant population in each bed will be reduced every year by various natural forces. The final stand will be a thin, healthy population of wild ginseng plants. In the wild-simulated method, after planting, no more work is required until the ginseng roots are dug six to ten years later. The ginseng plants are left to the vagaries of nature. Weeds on the forest door will compete with the plants for water and nutrients. Insects and rodents will attack certain plants. Fungus diseases infect ginseng plants from time to time. Severe weather may reduce plant growth. All of these stressful conditions result in a wild appearance of the roots that are eventually harvested. Digging the roots will be difficult work because they often become entwined with the roots of other woodland plants. The harvested roots should be air-dried in the shade. Investment The investment in a half acre of wild-simulated ginseng is $800.00 for 10 pounds of stratified seeds and 20 days of labor. A half acre will produce anywhere from 0 to 200 pounds of dried roots in six to ten years. 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Micro-environments may be found, however, that are good, if not perfect, places for ginseng to grow. Small pockets of cooler soil may be found very often on a north-facing hillside above a stream or river. Many Virginia landowners are successfully growing ginseng well out of the mountains. Marketing For several decades, natives of the Southern Appalachianregion have harvested natural plant materials from the wild for sale to the many medicinal herb buyers in the region. Very often these buyers operate small grocery stores. There is at least one buyer in every town in southwest Virginia. Products most commonly traded are ginseng, black cohosh, bloodroot, golden seal, lady slipper, mayapple and slippery elm. The local person, who buys the roots, bark, leaves or seeds from medicinal plants, often also buys furs and hides. These small buyers, in turn, sell the plant materials they purchase to regional brokers who either export the materials to the Orient or sell them directly to pharmaceutical companies in the United States. As native wild populations of these medicinal plants disappear due to over harvesting, potential increases for profitable sale of cultivated woodland medicinal plants. Indeed, many small landowners throughout the region have already successfully grown and sold these plants. There is never any problem marketing the products they grow. Prices fluctuate, of course, but the market channels developed years ago for sale of wild harvested plant materials can reliably be used for sale of any cultivated medicinal herbs in current demand. Page 2 User Rating: 4 / 5 By Andy Hankins American Ginseng (Panax quinquefolius) is a familiar plant to many people in the Appalachian region. For several generations "digging sang" has been an enjoyable and profitable activity for many mountain people. 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