

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Poaching Our Natural Heritage

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature

The common name ginseng refers to several species in the *Panax* genus, including *Panax ginseng*, found in east Asia, and *Panax quinquefolius*, often called American ginseng, found here in the United States. Both are used in traditional Chinese medicine.

American ginseng has been harvested from the southern Appalachians and sold to Chinese markets for generations. Unfortunately wild ginseng fetches the highest prices, and harvesting wild ginseng has proved unsustainable. As a result of declining ginseng populations, a permit is required to export it out of North Carolina and out of the United States. This permitting process isn't meant to be onerous, but rather to help ensure that the trade in ginseng is done in a sustainable manner. In fact, there is a vibrant, legal trade in ginseng grown on private lands, including using methods to simulate wild-grown ginseng. However, the temptation of easy money from illegally collecting and selling ginseng still exists.

In January, a federal judge sentence William Howard Ledford, of Hayesville, NC to a year in prison and a \$50,000 fine. Over a two-year period, Ledford sold ginseng for more than \$100,000 to Chiu Hung Lo, who is awaiting sentencing. Ledford's arrest and conviction is the result of a three-year investigation into ginseng and bear poaching in the Southern Appalachians.

Ginseng is part of our natural heritage in the Sothern Appalachians. Poaching and selling it illegally is an affront to the diversity and beauty of our mountains.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.