Ginseng Encyclopedia Article

Ginseng

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Ginseng

Ginseng is the most revered and well-known plant of Chinese herbal medicine; it is sold over the counter in Asian apothecaries and groceries worldwide. This plant of the family Araliaceae grows on both sides of the Pacific, with *Panax schinseng* the Asian form and *Panax quinquefolius* the North American form. It is a perennial herb with five-foliate leaves, and its fleshy aromatic root is valued as a tonic and a medicine.

The root has been used by Native Americans, Siberians, Chinese, and other Asians for millennia. Usually it is taken as a tea—once a day as a general preventative tonic, more frequently for therapeutic purposes. Since the North American form is considered the most potent, it is now grown in ASIA along with the local variety. American ginseng is also exported to Asia, then sometimes reimported into the United States as a Chinese or Korean herbal. Both the wild and cultivated forms are used. Roots older than five years are needed for good effect, and the older and larger the root (seven to fifteen years is prized), the more the ginseng costs. Dried roots are heated and sliced thinly to make tea, but pieces may be kept in the mouth, sucked, and eaten. The many ginseng products now sold (sodas, candies, etc.) have no real tonic or therapeutic value.

Figure 1
Ginseng

Ginseng has a bittersweet aromatic flavor, contains ALKALOIDS, and is said to be good for mental arousal and general well-being. It has not been established in Western medicine and pharmacology, although it contains properties that might be isolated and used pharmacologically.

See Also

Plants, Drugs From)