

by Ron Jones

The generic name for ginseng is *Panax*, from the Greek word *panacea*, referring to the many curative powers attributed to the herb. The word ginseng is a derivative of *ginshen*, a Chinese word for man-lin, alluding to the shape of the roots. This name was indicated to ancient peoples that the herb could be used to treat various ailments of the body. This ancient belief, that the shape of a plant revealed its medical usage, is called the Doctrine of Signatures. The major species used by the Asians are *Panax ginseng*, and there are several other species distributed through China, Japan, Korea and India. The North American species that is most similar to these Asian species is *Panax quinquefolium*. The

suggestion that we should become more involved in increasing public awareness of the dangers of over-collecting medicinal plants such as ginseng and goldenseal. Most WPA members probably know that there are people across the state actively digging medicinal plants for sale to herb buyers. Much of the digging takes place on public land, where digging limits for public should be completely enforced. Most of the digging occurs on private land without the landowner's knowledge or permission. Most landowners are probably not able to recognize medicinal plants when they see them, and are not aware of the true financial loss they have incurred when someone digs on their property. There should be a site for the WPA in educating the citizens of Kentucky about the impacts of the herb trade in our state. The address of the herb digger is a dig in that direction.

Most of us are also aware that plants from Europe and Asia have been introduced into our natural communities and in some cases are rapidly displacing native species. Several highly invasive species are being sold to nurseries and garden centers, perhaps because the sellers and buyers are not aware of their potential for escape. Once again, WPA can help bring this issue to the attention of the public, and again, a future issue of the newsletter will focus on these concerns.