

Ginseng and the first US ship to China

verdavita editorial team · Published 2026-11-05

When the Empress of China left New York in 1784 and opened direct US trade with China, ginseng was a key part of its cargo. The trade began decades earlier, with Mohawk knowledge of the forest.

A search in New France

Jesuit missionary Joseph-François Lafitau knew of ginseng from reports about northeastern China and reasoned that a related plant might grow in similar forests in North America. In 1716 he found it with the help of Mohawk people near Caughnawaga.

A trade across the world

A trade soon followed, around 1718, with harvesting by Native Americans, French fur traders and frontiersmen, including Daniel Boone.

1716
Lafitau finds American ginseng with Mohawk help

c. 1718
A trade to China begins

1784
The Empress of China sails from New York

1800s
The China trade continues to grow

Accounts of cargo size and profit differ, so we leave them out.

1784

The Empress of China sailed from New York on February 22, 1784, carrying ginseng as a main export. Accounts of the cargo size and profit differ, but the voyage is widely seen as the start of the American China trade.

Wild ginseng's history also includes heavy harvesting, which is one reason its trade is regulated today.

See every label before you buy

verdavita shows the full Supplement Facts panel on every product page. One-time purchase, 90-day money-back guarantee.

verdavita.com/shop

Sources

- Encyclopedia.com: Ginseng, American
  https://www.encyclopedia.com/medicine/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ginseng-american
- Smithsonian Folklife
  https://folklife.si.edu/Contents/Item/Display/12252
- Hektoen International: Ginseng
  https://hekint.org/?p=34879

History, not health advice. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting a supplement, especially if you are pregnant, nursing, take medication or have a medical condition. Published by prociro LLC, 1209 Mountain Road Pl NE, Ste N, Albuquerque, NM 87110, USA, which sells dietary supplements under the verdavita brand. Current version: https://verdavita.com/learn-ginseng-and-the-empress-of-china