

| WAUSAU, WI

## Panax Quinquefolius (American Ginseng)

# CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

by Lou Jurassic



Sliced ginseng



Ginseng garden at berry time

The farmland around Wausau does more than pasture cows and produce row crops. It also makes Marathon County a world-leader in production of the all-purpose herbal remedy ginseng. The primary market for the slow-growing root? China.

If that seems a bit like selling coal in Newcastle, Butch Weege, executive director of the Ginseng Board of Wisconsin, can explain. "We have a different strain of ginseng. The Chinese consider our ginseng the cooling variety, and theirs the heating variety. It's been established that American ginseng can be taken continually, while after three or four months users should take a break from the Chinese variety. When they [Asian producers] have tried to grow from our seeds, the results are different."

The highly prized herb is a mainstay of Eastern medicine and is credited with easing stress, improving energy and aiding in overall well-being. It is currently the focus of several major research studies by the likes of Johns Hopkins and the Mayo Clinic.

Ginseng has been a small part of the local Wausau economy ever since well-traveled Jesuit explorers noticed the popular Asian herb growing wild in the Wisconsin woods in the 1600s. It's been cultivated beneath manmade shelters in ginseng gardens since the 1880s.

The industry is not for the faint of heart or impatient. It takes about four-and-a-half years from planting to harvest. While waiting for the crop to turn to

cash, growers face all the typical agricultural hazards plus another peculiarity. Ginseng will not thrive if planted in dirt that has ever supported a previous ginseng crop. "You have to do your homework to make sure that you've got virgin soil," Weege said. Farmers typically lease fresh ground or buy new farms after just one harvest.

The rigorous effort plus overproduction during the 1990s contributed to a decline in grower participation over the past decade. The Wisconsin industry, with its premium product, has also been hard-hit by Asian trademark pirates.

In 2004 on his first trip to China, Weege was shocked to discover counterfeit labels touting inferior Chinese ginseng as Wisconsin's own. The Chinese government intervened on behalf of the Wisconsin growers. Now, with more than 40 lawsuits settled and others in the works, Weege is encouraged about future prospects for Wisconsin ginseng. Medical breakthroughs also help his cause. "The Mayo Clinic did a pilot study that indicates that our ginseng can be very helpful in alleviating the fatigue that plagues cancer patients. Now they're doing a full-blown clinical study of the issue. Johns Hopkins is doing research on ginseng's effects in preventing and treating breast cancer. The research has spawned a groundswell of interest in the product," he said.



The genuine trademark copied by Asian pirates.



Inspecting a garden 1930

The medical research, just like the piracy lawsuits, takes a long time to complete. But that's okay, according to Weege. "Ginseng growers know the benefits of patience," he said.

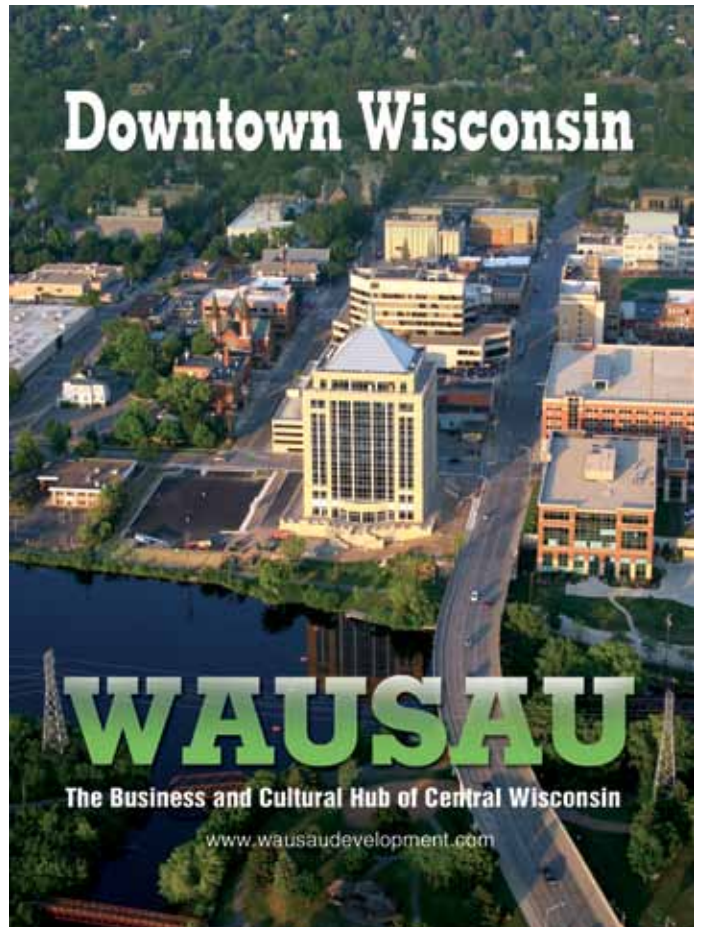
Wisconsin ginseng is typically available in Chinese herbal stores or online from the Ginseng Board's Co-op. ■

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**WAUSAU'S GREAT FOR GROWING FAMILIES**

Wausau is good for ginseng. It's also great for families, according to Butch Weege, executive director of the Ginseng Board of Wisconsin. Weege has lived in Marathon County since 1967. He married into a family of ginseng growers and entered the industry in 1982.

"Wausau offers a great lifestyle," he said. It's a nice-sized little town surrounded by wonderful four-season recreation, lots of open water and plenty of opportunities for quality higher education.



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## Singer/Songwriter Will Kimbrough Shares Top Nashville Picks

by Carlton Tajni



**M**ost tourists know enough to hit Nashville's high points. Must-sees include the Ryman Auditorium, the Mother Church of country music and former home of the Grand Ole Opry; Ryman's successor in that role the glitzy Grand Ole Opry House; the Bluebird Café where Garth Brooks got his big break and hopeful newcomers still hope to grab the spotlight; and of course the Country Music Hall of Fame.

For beyond-the-obvious Nashville travel advice we looked to singer/songwriter Will Kimbrough, who has spent more than two decades making his living and practicing his craft in Music City USA. As a multi-faceted music professional, he lives a "pretty typical" family existence with his wife and two kids in Hillsboro Village, a pedestrian-friendly downtown neighborhood near the Vanderbilt campus. His time on the road makes him acutely aware that Nashville is a very good place to be.

"There's tons of great music here, and it's not just country music," he said. "Bluegrass musicians are some of the most amazing in the world in terms of technical ability, and The Station Inn is one of the world's great centers of bluegrass. It's in an old cinderblock building in the 12 South urbanized area, a real anomaly in a neighborhood full of martini bars and sushi restaurants. You'll hear people there who tour with the biggest acts with instruments that aren't mic'ed up."

Norm's River Roadhouse, 13 miles west of town, is another favorite musical showcase. "It's a great little place where you might see some very unexpected music from Nashville or out of town. Then there's The Basement, a club under Grimey's Music Store. They're pretty well known as an indie music store and definitely worth the visit," Kimbrough said.

Kimbrough, who has collaborated with big-name stars including Jimmy Buffet, grew up in



Kimbrough's two most recent albums are about the balance between home and travel. He explained that *Home Away*, released in 2002, is about a person who has young children and struggles with being away from family. "It's about working out how to strike a balance." *Wings* came out in February and features a title cut co-written with Jimmy Buffet. "It's about acknowledging that once the balance is struck you still have to make good choices for your family."

Alabama listening to the Beatles and the blues. He performs his highly personal repertoire to audiences around the country and throughout the world, but while in Nashville he likes to spend time near home.

"Hillsboro Village is a bungalow-kind of neighborhood built between the turn of the 20th century and the 1930s. There are some great places all within walking distance of my house. Fido's is a diner sort of place where some pretty famous musicians hang out." Breakfasts are a specialty. "Brown's Diner is a great old-school burger and beer kind of place."

For a more refined dining experience Kimbrough likes City House restaurant in the Germantown neighborhood. "The owner picks all the food locally. The menu changes seasonally. The meat is organic. There's what I term comfort food but it's prepared in different ways. The sausage is homemade. Prices aren't exorbitant." City House's twist on down-home cooking includes Tripp



Will Kimbrough's multi-faceted musical career runs the gamut from songwriting to producing to performing.

Country Ham and Parsnip Pizza and Cornmeal Crusted Catfish with Celery Root Agro Dolce. Not your average Nashville meat-and-three kind of café.



Nashville is home to a full-sized replica of the Parthenon.

For educational family-fun Kimbrough suggests the Parthenon in Centennial Park. "It's a full-size replica of the one in Greece and inside is a full-sized replica of the statue of Athena. I took my eight-year-old there last week. It was cool and not very expensive," he said.

"I love my work and I like to go out of town, but I love to go home to Nashville," he concluded. ■