

FGCU Food Forest

Plant Database

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* (subsp.) *canadensis*)

Origin: North America, East of the Rocky

Description: A deciduous shrub growing to 3 m or more tall that produces dark purple to black berries and has large corymbs of white flowers.

Harvest: Perennial plant that produces berries in the fall.

Flower: In summer, it bears large (20–30 cm diameter) corymbs of white flowers above the foliage, the individual flowers 5–6 mm diameter, with five petals.

Tolerance: Tolerates a wide variety of wet to soil. pH 6.1-7.5.

General Description: It is a deciduous suckering shrub growing to 3 m or more tall. The leaves are arranged in opposite pairs, pinnate with five to nine leaflets, the leaflets around 10 cm long and 5 cm broad. In summer, it bears large (20–30 cm diameter) corymbs of white flowers above the foliage, the individual flowers 5–6 mm diameter, with five petals.

The fruit is a dark purple to black berry 3–5 mm diameter, produced in drooping clusters in the fall. The berries and flowers are edible when processed, but other parts of the plant are poisonous, containing toxic calcium oxalate crystals.



- **Native Origin:** *Sambucus canadensis* (American Elderberry) is native to a large area of North America east of the Rocky Mountains, and south through eastern Mexico and Central America to Panama.
- **General History:** Black elderberry has been used medicinally for hundreds of years. Some preliminary studies demonstrate that elderberry may have a measurable effect in treating the flu, alleviating allergies, and boosting overall respiratory health. Elder is used in traditional

Chinese medicine, dissolved in wine, for rheumatism and traumatic injury. In 1984, a group of twenty-five people were made sick, apparently by elderberry juice pressed from fresh, uncooked *Sambucus mexicana* berries, leaves, and stems. However, all twenty-five recovered quickly, including one individual who was hospitalized after drinking five glasses. Elderberry folklore is extensive and can be wildly conflicting depending on region. In some areas, the "elder tree" was supposed to ward off evil influence and give protection from witches, while other beliefs say that witches often congregate under the plant, especially when it is full of fruit. If an elder tree was cut down, a spirit known as the Elder Mother would be released and take her revenge. The tree could only safely be cut while chanting a rhyme to the Elder Mother.

- **Distribution:** Elderberry's native distribution is Nova Scotia to Florida, Manitoba, Dakotas, Oklahoma, and Texas. It can be planted as a hedge or alone. Provides effective erosion control on moist sites.
- **Season:** This is a perennial plant that flowers April - May (in south); June - July (in north). Berries are produced in drooping clusters in the fall. You should prune it heavily in winter to maintain thick form. Elderberry is a fast grower and aggressive competitor with weeds and herbaceous species. Individual plants are very short-lived, however root masses produce new shoots. Cutting the whole bush to the ground every other year may be necessary to keep the bushes in check.
- **Uses: Use Wildlife:** Berries are relished by many bird species and mammals. Deer eat twigs and leaves. **Use Food:** Elderberries, inedible when fresh and raw, are used for making jelly, preserves, pies, and wine. **Use Medicinal:** The bark, leaves, and flowers have served in home remedies but can be toxic. **Warning: POISONOUS PARTS:** Leaves, twigs (stems), roots, unripe fruits. Low toxicity if ingested. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, coma. Toxic Principle: Cyanogenic glycoside and alkaloid.

Elderberry	
Scientific Classification	
Kingdom:	Plantae
(unranked):	Angiosperms
(unranked):	Eudicots
(unranked):	Asterids
Order:	Dipsacales
Family:	Adoxaceae
Genus:	<i>Sambucus</i>
Species:	<i>S. canadensis</i>

Sources

http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=SANIC4

<http://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=85>

<http://davesgarden.com/guides/pf/go/957/>

<http://enature.com/fieldguides/detail.asp?recnum=TS0229>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sambucus>

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