

JoybileeFarm.com *Materia Medica*

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis* or *Sambucus glauca*)

Common names:

Black Elder, Common Elder, Pipe Tree, Bore Tree, Ellhorn, Blue-berried elder

Physical Features:

The Elder is a coarse shrub that grows 5 to 15 feet in height, with several stems coming up from the root. The bark is grey and pitted. The young stems are brittle and break easily. The inside of the stems is filled with a pith that is easily removed, leaving the stems and branches hollow. The leaves are compound with 5 to 11 compound leaflets, toothed and pointed at the tips. The leaves are smooth and shiny on top, but hairy and lighter beneath. The tree blooms in June or July with large, flat topped, sprays of white flowers. The many blossoms in each spray are small, only about 1/4 inch across, white, and fragrant. The blossoms are followed by bunches of purple-black, juicy berries, with a waxy bluish. The leaves and stems of elder berry are toxic. The flowers and cooked berries are safe to use for medicine.



Historical Information:

In 400 BC, Hippocrates referred to the elderberry bush as his “medicine chest” because of its varied uses.

It was mentioned several times in the writings of Pliny the Elder as being used by the ancient Romans.

“The leaves, bruised, if worn in the hat or rubbed on the face, prevent flies settling on the person. In order to safeguard the skin from the attacks of mosquitoes, midges and other troublesome flies, an infusion of the leaves may be dabbed on with advantage. Gather a few fresh leaves from the elder, tear them from their stalks and place them in a jug, pouring boiling water on them and covering them at once, leaving for a few hours. When the infusion is cold, it is fit for use and should be at once poured off into a bottle and kept tightly corked. It is desirable to make a fresh infusion often. The leaves are said to be valued by the farmer for driving mice away from granaries and moles from their usual haunts.”

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“Linnaeus observed that sheep eat the leaves, also cows, but that horses and goats refuse it. If sheep that have the foot-rot can get at the bark and young shoots, they will cure themselves. Elderberries are eaten greedily by young birds and pigeons, but are said to have serious effects on chickens: the flowers are reported to be fatal to turkeys, and according to Linnaeus, also to peacocks.”

Range and Growing Conditions:

It grows in valley and stream borders in open situations throughout the USA and in Southern Canada. It grows in zone 3 to 11. It prefers moist ground and will make a thicket in cleared areas and logged areas. Plantations of black and dark blue elderberries are springing up commercially in the USA, due to the valuable medicinal qualities and the unique taste of elderberries.

Parts Used:

Flowers, leaves (externally only), and ripe berries

Cultivation: Wildcrafting Tips:

The flowers are collected in June or July when fully opened. Partially dry the flowers in shade in a warm spot and then shake the flowers from the stems over a bowl. Dry the flowers as rapidly as possible using gentle heat, to avoid discoloration and spoilage.

Collect the berries in August or September before the birds and bears feast on them, when they are fully ripe, and sweet.

The leaves are gathered fresh, as needed, and macerated in oil immediately.

Primary Constituents:

Flower: Triterpenes (ursolic acid, oleanolic acid, a- and b-amyrin, sterols), free fatty acids (linoleic, linolenic, and palmitic), phenolic acids (chlorogenic)

Leaf: Triterpenes, cyanogenic glycosides, including sambunigrin; flavonoids (kaempferol, quercetin) quercetin glycosided, miscellaneous fatty acids, alkanes, tannins.

Berry: 73 calories per 100 grams; vitamin A, B6, C, potassium, calcium, iron, magnesium, anthrocynines,

Action:

Flower: Diaphoretic, anticatarrhal, antispasmodic,

Leaf: Purgative, expectorant, diuretic, diaphoretic (internal); emollient, vulnerary (external)

Berry: Diaphoretic, laxative, antirheumatic.

Body Systems affected:

Use the leaf as a treatment for bruises, wounds, chilblains, and sprains.

Use the flowers and berries as a treatment for influenza, cough, colds, and inflammation of the lungs, nose, and throat.

Use the berry for arthritis and rheumatism, as well as treatment for influenza, herpes, HIV, common cold, and inflammation of the lungs, nose, and throat.



Preparations & Dosage:

Elderflower tincture (1:5 in 40%)- 2 to 4ml 3 times a day.

Infusion of dried or fresh blossoms — 1 cup of boiling water over 2 tsp. Infuse for 10 min. Drink hot 3 times a day.

Berries: Boil fresh berries in water for 3 to 5 min. Press the juice out of the berries. Sweeten with 1 part honey to 10 parts juice. Take 1 tsp. To 1 tbsp. Of the syrup in 1 glass of water, 3 to 4 times a day. The syrup can be added to sparkling water or even taken right off the spoon. Child dose 1 tsp. 4 times a day, adult dose 1 tbsp. 3 or 4 times a day.

Make an ointment with 1 part elder leaf and 2 parts coconut oil. Heat until leaves are crisp. Stain. Store in glass jar with tight lid. Use for cuts, bruises, sprains. Mix with arnica, St. John`s Wort, and calendula. (external use only).

Notes:

No side effects or interactions have been noted.

Elderberry was the 2013 Herb of the year. “Elderberries possess extraordinary powers as virus and bacteria fighters...Studies show that elder extracts provide powerful relief of the symptoms of colds and flus. Indeed elderberry extracts have been shown to deactivate the protein the flu virus needs to attach itself to cells.” (Richter 20)

The 2014 Richter’s catalogue boasts 6 varieties of purple-black berry yielding plants, including 4 new varieties from commercial plantations in North America. None are currently patented.

Studies have shown a standardized extract of elderberries to be effective against avian influenza. It reduced the duration of the flu. Research is ongoing regarding the use of elderberry extract for the treatment of allergies, cancer, inflammatory disorders and HIV.

Elderberry wine has been shown to soothe inflammation related to arthritis symptoms.

When elderberry hunting, only the blue or black variety (also identifiable by the white surface coating, similar to blueberries) are good for eating, although they require cooking, because the raw berries contain a cyanide-like chemical. **Green, unripe, or bright red elderberries (*Sambucus ebulus*) are bitter and possibly toxic, even when cooked.**

First nations tribes used the elderberry as a flu treatment, for fevers. They used the hollowed out branches to make flutes and pipes.

An ointment made with the elder flower is useful for skin eruptions.

“Besides lots of flavonoids and free radical-scouring antioxidants, elderberries contain 87 percent of the daily value in vitamin C, and high amounts of vitamin A, potassium, iron, vitamin B6, fiber, and betacarotene.” (Mercola)

Elderberry Ketchup

1 pint Elderberries, 1 OZ. shallots, 1 blade mace, 1/2 oz. peppercorns, 1 1/2 OZ. whole ginger, 1 pint vinegar.

Pick the berries (which must be ripe) from the stalks, weigh and wash them. Put them into an unglazed crock or jar, pour over the boiling vinegar and leave all night in a cool oven. Next day, strain the liquor from the berries through a cloth tied on to the legs of an inverted chair and put it into a pan, with the peeled and minced shallots, the ginger peeled and cut up small, the mace and peppercorns. Boil for 10 minutes, then put into bottles, dividing the spices among the bottles. Cork well.

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Elderberry Chutney

2 lb. Elderberries, 1 large Onion, 1 pint vinegar, 1 teaspoonful salt, 1 teaspoonful ground ginger, 2 tablespoonsful sugar, 1 saltspoonful cayenne and mixed spices, 1 teaspoonful mustard seed.

Stalk, weigh and wash the berries; put them into a pan and bruise with a wooden spoon; chop the onion and add with the rest of the ingredients and vinegar. Bring to the boil and simmer till it becomes thick. Stir well, being careful not to let it burn as it thickens. Put into jars and cover.

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References:

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