



American Elderberry (*Sambucus Canadensis*)

American Elderberry is a deciduous medium to large shrub or bush that is native to the central and eastern U.S. This plant produces delicious dark purple berries that offer health benefits and can be used in a range of recipes. Elderberry thrives in riparian situations and has become increasingly more popular in commercial production and urban agroforestry practices.

Consumption

Elderberry contains high levels of antioxidants and is even considered a “superfruit”. Elderberries have a sweet taste and are thus perfect for making juice, jelly, and even wine. The berries can also be used in pies, pancakes, and yogurt. Additionally, elderberry is used to make food colorants, dietary supplements, and medicinal products. It is important to note that raw elderberries are mildly toxic and should be cooked or processed before consuming them. The flowers found on elderberry bushes, elderflowers, also have a multitude of culinary uses. These flowers can be handpicked off the bush and directly eaten. Elderflowers can be infused into sugar, honey, and alcohol to make a delicious cocktail. The flowers can also be used to make tea, cordials, and elderflower syrup.

Planting & Cultivation

American elderberry is hardy in Zones 3-8 and grows between 5-12 feet tall. Elderberry can be grown in a variety of conditions, but is best suited for moist and slightly acidic soils in well-draining areas that receive plenty of sun. Due to this, elderberry is ideal in riparian situations such as along streams and roadside ditches. However, if planting elderberry in soil with inadequate drainage, plant on raised berms.. Additionally, for sustained yields cut the plant down after each year’s harvest. This will help to generate larger clusters of berries since the largest berries grow on new shoots.

Light: full sun, part sun

Soil: rich, moist, well-draining, pH 5.5-6.5

Watering: medium (will tolerate some dryness)

Tolerances: cold-tolerant (Northern varieties)

Identification: serrated, compound leaves (5-9 leaflets); bark is gray with raised bumps; flowers are radially symmetrical with 5 white petals and 5 stamens



Other Benefits

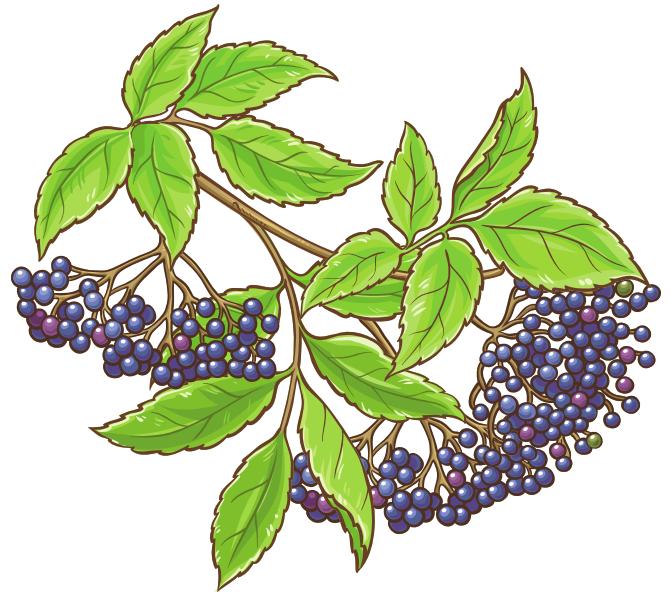
In late spring and early summer, elderberry produces fragrant white flowers. These blooms attract pollinators such as bees, beetles, and flies. The berries also provide food for wildlife and the branches offer shelter for nesting birds. Additionally, elderberry is effective at controlling erosion in areas prone to moisture and flooding. Overall, elderberry is an ideal choice for pollinator, edible, and rain gardens.

Additional Information Available At:

- University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry
<https://extension.missouri.edu/media/wysiwyg/Extensiondata/Pub/pdf/agguides/agroforestry/af1017.pdf>
- Iowa State University
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/smallfarms/agroforestry-farm-elderberry>
- North Carolina State Extension
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/sambucus-canadensis/#:~:text=American%20elderberry%20tolerates%20a%20wide,the%20suckers%20are%20not%20removed.>

Did You Know?

- The genus name may be derived from sambuco, the Italian word for the elder bush.
- Elderberry plants will likely remain productive for at least five years, but the full productive life of an elderberry planting is not known.
- Elderberry plants can live up to 100 years.



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