

ELDERBERRIES



Elderberries (*Sambucus canadensis*) are one of the few native fruits of North America. They have been used for centuries to make jams, jellies, and wines, and to provide a myriad of health benefits. Before the summer berries form, large, flat clusters of sweetly scented white flowers appear in spring.

ENJOYING THE FRUIT

Very ripe fruits may be eaten raw but are generally most palatable when cooked. Elderberries can be made into pie, jam, wine, and syrup, among other options.

Note that red elderberries are never edible, and European elderberry varieties must be cooked before eating.

The flowers are edible; in addition to using them for tea, some people fry them in batter.

People have used elderberry fruits and flowers medicinally for thousands of years, and today you can see it as a flu and cold remedy in modern drugstores. The berries are high in vitamins C and A, antioxidants, and minerals including iron.



CHOOSING A SITE

Elderberries are tolerant of partial shade and damp soil, although they prefer full sun and a well-drained, loamy location. The shrub can grow 5-8 feet high and 3-8 feet wide. It can be planted alone or as a hedge.

PLANTING

Elderberries are self-fruitful, but a larger yield will result when two varieties are planted side by side. They are hardy to zone 4. They have shallow roots, so mulch is beneficial. Before planting, amend the soil with compost.

TAKING CARE: WATERING, FEEDING, PRUNING

Plants will begin producing fruit after two to three years. Elderberry bushes tend to sucker freely; one-year-old branches will produce side shoots, or laterals, on which fruit will appear in the following years.

In late winter, prune back old stems (3+ years old) to the ground to maintain the plant's vigor.

Add an inch or two of compost each year to fertilize.

AVOIDING PESTS AND DISEASE

Elderberries don't face any significant pest or disease pressures in our area. You can place netting over some plants to deter birds and keep more of the fruit for your own use!

HARVESTING

In summer, berries appear and then turn dark purple when they are ready for harvest. The fruits are quite perishable and should be processed soon after picking.

Prune the entire cluster off the bush and strip the berries from their smaller stems. One way to do this is to put entire

clusters of berries on a flat tray, freeze them for a few hours, and then shake the clusters over a bowl to dislodge the berries.

RESTORING WILDLIFE HABITAT

Elderberries are an excellent choice for wildlife habitats. The blossoms host numerous butterflies in the spring, and many species of birds are attracted to the fruit in the fall. Its branches provide shelter for birds, squirrels, and other animals. Once established, the plants are seldom bothered by deer.



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