

# Elderberry

*Sambucus nigra*

Sweet Elder

Elderberry is a valuable ornamental and fruiting shrub. The fruit is used for juice, wine, baked goods, jellies and preserves; and it is also prized by birds and other wildlife. Bears love the fruit. Fruit of the red elderberry is toxic and must be cooked before consuming. In the middle ages, Elderberry was considered a Holy Tree, capable of restoring good health, keeping good health, and as an aid to longevity. Native Americans made wide use of the shrub, fruit, and flowers. The common name "elder" is from the Anglo-Saxon "ellen," meaning fire-kindler, from the flammable pith. There are many cultivated varieties of elderberry, most derived from the European *S. nigra*. The North American wild form, *S. canadensis* is found widely in the understory of forests. My specimens are of the variegated form of *S nigra*.



## Identification

### Leaves

Deciduous, opposite, pinnately compound, 6-10" long with 5-9 serrate leaflets <1-3" each.



### Bark/Wood

Young growth is soft and pithy but aged wood is hard. Bark is thin, grayish to dark brown, irregularly furrowed and ridged.

### Flower/Fruit

Monoecious; somewhat self infertile, umbrel inflorescences flat topped, white to cream, with a pleasant odor. Berries are 1/4" blue to purple black.



### Form

Shrub up to 15 feet tall, far less commonly single stemmed small tree. Broadly growing and irregular.



### Uses

Fruits are gathered for wine, jellies, candy, pies, and sauces. Small commercially grown plantations, though fruit is not generally available. Elderberry has been used in stream bank stabilization and for food, cover, and nesting sites for birds.

### Ethnobotany

Native Americans used wood for combs, pegs, basketry, and arrow shafts; hollow stems as blowguns, flutes, and whistles. Fruits eaten raw or dried as well as used for dyes. The pith was used as tinder.

### Native Distribution

North America and Europe.

### Establishment

Very dependent on cultivar or variety.

## Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size	15'Hx15'Wx6" dbh	Soils	Diverse
USDA Zone	5-9	Drought Tolerant?	Yes
Light Requirements	Part to Full Sun	Inundation Tolerant?	Yes

### Pests/Damaging Agents

Few pests or damaging agents.

### Similar Species

### Propagation

Best grown from seed. Dry, cold stratify, often don't germinate until second spring.

### Source(s)

Transplants from Northwoods Nursery, Molalla, OR.