

Growing along hedgerows, in parks, pathways, and forgotten places, the elder, *Sambucus* sp. is among our most antiviral fruits here in Canada. An aggressively spreading bush, the elder, or legion as it used to also be called, can be found all over the world. The species most often found nearby is *Sambucus canadensis* and *Sambucus nigra*. Commercially, many growers sell the Adams variety (indeterminate).

There is nothing quite like the elder. Once you stumble upon a patch, you will know it based on the following clues. First, the leaves are pinnate (for every leaf on one side of the stem, there is another opposite). Second clue: by mid-July, the prolific white flowers emerge in a large umbel inflorescence (umbrella-like

cluster). By August, the flowers have given way to small green berries, ripening to blue/purple in colour. The berries linger until the blue jays, robins, starlings or humans descend and devour the entire crop. If in doubt, consult a field guide such as *A Peterson Field Guide To Edible Wild Plants: Eastern and central North America* by Roger Tory Peterson.

Buying elderberries is prohibitively expensive, as the harvesting is time-consuming. Therefore, it is best to obtain your own stock. In the spring, many growers sell cuttings or the new shoots that emerge from the base of the plant, in gallon pots. Because the elder is so aggressive, it will have no problem in the garden, as long as it has access to some sunlight, and its roots are unhindered.

During the first year of growth, it is important to pick the flowers, which you can consume raw, or prepare as a hot infusion (1 ounce of fresh or dried flowers in a quart of hot water, covered - drink once cooled).



When you are able to harvest the berries the following year, heat in a pot of water to a boil, then simmer covered for about 30 minutes. Next, put a metal strainer over a bowl, pour elderberries (along with any liquid), and use a potato masher to push through as much liquid as you can. Sweeten the liquid "syrup" to taste, pour into glass jars, and put in the fridge or freezer.

At the first inkling that you may be sick, drink a cup of your elderberry syrup. Dosage (from *Herbal Antivirals* by Buhner): 2-4 tsp every 2-4 hours during the early stages of cold/flu infection. The scientific studies on the effectiveness of elderberries against specific viruses is extensive, and can be found in the above mentioned book on pages 232-233 and pages 240-242.

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