



NOTE: This page is designed to be viewed in a frame with an index and site contents. [Take this link to view this page in the frames format.](#)

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## Common Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)

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[Caprifoliaceae / Honeysuckle](#)

Common Elderberry is also known as Elder or Elderberry, Black Elder, Bourtree and Pipe Tree. The American plants have been considered a separate species (*S. canadensis*) but are now considered a subspecies..

**Plant Type:** This is a shrub, it is a [perennial](#) which can reach a height of 3.66 Meters (12 feet) .

**Leaves:** The leaves are alternate. Each leaf is [pinnately](#) divided with five to seven [lanceolate](#) leaflets with finely toothed margins. Crushed leaves may have an unpleasant odor.

**Flowers:** The flowers have 5 Regular Parts and are up to 0.63cm wide (0.25 inches). They are cream white with yellow anthers. Blooms first appear in late spring and continue into late summer. The small flowers are in a large, showy, nearly flat cluster.

**Fruit:** Dark purple, almost black, berries with red juice.

**Habitat:** Moist areas, often near water.

**Range:** Most of North America except desert areas and the pacific northwest.

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The name may come from the Anglo-Saxon term *ellaern* or *aeld* which means "fire" or "to kindle a fire". ([Volák & Stodola](#)) The pith of the stems was used as tinder and the hollowed stems to blow the fire. ([Grieve](#)) Elder is a fast growing shrub seldom reaching tree size. Often seen along fence rows and ditches and stream banks the copious berries of the Elder are a valued by many species including humans. Elderberry wine and jelly are relished in many parts of the country and many birds and mammals also enjoy the berries and help to spread the seeds. The flowers can also be eaten. Know as Elder Blow they are battered and fried to make a delicate desert. Recipes for this and other things made with Elder can be found in Euel Gibbons' classic [Stalking the Wild Asparagus](#).

**Lore:** Stone age sites from Europe reveal that Elder has been valued by mankind for thousands of years. Some thought that spirits lived among the plants and refused to cut them down. ([Erichsen-Brown](#)) The Elder shows up in the myth and legend of many peoples in the old world and the new. The various beliefs are far to numerous to list here in entirety. The stems have been used to make musical instruments such as flutes and Native Americans made clapper sticks used ceremonially to accompany singing and dancing. The stems have been used to make arrow shafts and blowguns. In addition, the berries formed a principle food for some tribes. The leaves, crushed and rubbed on the skin or worn under a hat are thought to keep insects at bay and the juice has been used by gardeners to protect other plants from insects. The wood has been used to make various delicate instruments such as combs, skewers, needles for weaving nets and is said to persist in the earth longer than an iron bar. ([Grieve](#))

**Medical Uses:** Large amounts of vitamin C, flavenoids and rutin, which are known to improve immune function account for the use of the juice and flower tea as a cold remedy and tannins account for many of the other medical uses. Native Americans used the inner bark to make tea used as a diuretic, emetic

and laxative and poultice it on various injuries. Modern herbalist tend to use only the flowers and fruits for similar purposes. The flowers are used in tea to treat fevers and stimulate perspiration, sooth headache and to treat colds, flue, dropsy, rheumatism, consumption, urinary infections and many other conditions. **Warning:** Fruits from related species that are red, unripe fruits, leaves and other parts of the plant may be dangerously purgative and should not be ingested. ([Foster & Duke](#)) ([Dobelis](#))



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The Search below may provide more information about this species. Some of URLs may have been used as a source for this page not otherwise cited. Most of the information not cited comes from multiple sources that can be found in the [Books](#) page. The USDA plant links are provided by: USDA, NRCS 1999. The PLANTS database (<http://plants.usda.gov/>). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA. You can check species names at [ITIS Advanced Search](#) to see if they meet the current ITIS taxonomic criteria.

Sambucus nigra

Google Search

 Web  2bnTheWild.com

By: B. Eugene Wofford and Edward W. Chester. , ISBN:1572332050

Both a key and 380 color photos make this book useful for identifying the woody plants of Tennessee.

**Classification:**

Kingdom	Division	Class	Subclass	Family	Subfamily	Tribe	Genus
Plantae	Magnoliophyta Angiosperms / Flowering Plants	Magnoliopsida Dicots / Two Seed Leaves	Asteridae Aster	Caprifoliaceae Honeysuckle			Sambucus

