

ELDER, AMERICAN



Sambucus canadensis [sam-BYOO-kus ka-na-DEN-sis] (Sometimes lumped in as subspecies *canadensis* of the European *Sambucus nigra*).

Family: Caprifoliaceae

Names: Amerikaanse Vlier, Amerikan Murveri, Common Elder, Elder, Elderberry; Autumn-Flowering Elder; Black-Berried Elder; Sweet Elder, Sambucus, Black Elder, Alhuren, Battree, Bour Tree, Eldrum, Ellhorn, Hylder, Lady Ellhorn, Old Gal, Old Lady, Pipe Tree, Rob Elder, Tree of Doom

Description: A shrub growing to 12 feet in height. The branches are yellowish gray; the pith is white. The leaves are made up of leaflets, usually toothed. The flowers are white, the fruit purplish black, ¼ inch in diameter. It is hardy to zone 3. It is in flower in July, and the seeds ripen in September. The scented flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by insects.

Cultivation: Tolerates most soils, including chalk, but prefers a moist loamy soil. Grows

well in heavy clay soils. Tolerates some shade but is best in a sunny position. Tolerates atmospheric pollution and coastal situations. A very hardy plant, when dormant it tolerates temperatures down to about -30°F. A fast-growing but short-lived plant, it often forms thickets by means of root suckers. Yields of up to 7kg of fruit per tree have been recorded. Plants in this genus are notably resistant to honey fungus. Propagate by seed best sown as soon as it is ripe in the autumn in a cold frame, when it should germinate in early spring. Stored seed can be sown in the spring in a cold frame but will probably germinate better if it is given 2 months warm followed by 2 months cold stratification first. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle. If good growth is made, the young plants can be placed in their permanent positions during the early summer. Otherwise, either put them in a sheltered nursery bed, or keep them in their pots in a sheltered position and plant them out in spring of the following year. Cuttings of half-ripe wood, 7 - 10cm with a heel, July/August in a frame. Cuttings of mature wood of the current season's growth, 15 - 20cm with a heel, late autumn in a frame or a sheltered outdoor bed. Division of suckers in the dormant season.

Properties: Antiinflammatory; Aperient; Diaphoretic; Diuretic; Emetic; Expectorant; Laxative; Purgative; Stimulant.

Constituents: Flavonoids (rutin, quercetin), terpenes, sambunigrin, sambucine, chlorogenic acid

Medicinal Uses: American elder was widely employed as a medicinal herb by many native North American tribes who used it to treat a

wide range of complaints. It is still commonly used as a domestic remedy. A tea made from the inner bark and root bark is diuretic, emetic and a strong laxative. A tea made from the root bark is used to promote labor in childbirth and in treating headaches, kidney problems and mucous congestion. The inner bark is also applied as a poultice to cuts, sore or swollen limbs etc in order to relieve pain and swelling. A poultice of the leaves is applied to bruises and to cuts in order to stop the bleeding. An infusion of the leaf buds is strongly purgative. Elder flowers are stimulant, diaphoretic and diuretic. A warm tea of the flowers is stimulant and induces sweating, taken cold it is diuretic. It is used in the treatment of fevers and infant colic. An infusion of the leaves and flowers is used as an antiseptic wash for skin problems, wounds etc. The fresh juice of the fruit, evaporated into a syrup, is laxative. It also makes a good ointment for treating burns when mixed with an oily base. The dried fruit can be made into a tea that is useful in the treatment of cholera and diarrhea.

Toxicity: The leaves and stems of this species are poisonous. The fruit has been known to cause stomach upsets to some people. Flowers are edible. Any toxin the fruit might contain is liable to be of very low toxicity and is destroyed when the fruit is cooked

Ritual Uses: Element : Water

Ruling Planet: Venus

Gender : Feminine

Magickal Powers: Exorcism, Protection, Healing, Prosperity, Sleep

Culinary Uses: The fruit is eaten raw or cooked and has a bittersweet flavor. They are at their best after being dried, the fresh raw fruit has a rather rank taste. The fruit is normally cooked and used in pies, jams, jellies, sauces, bread etc. Rich in vitamin C. The flowers are eaten raw or cooked. They are often covered in batter and made into fritters. The flowers can be picked when unopened, pickled and then used as a flavoring in candies etc. They can also be soaked in water to make a

drink. A pleasant tasting tea is made from the dried flowers.

Other Uses: The leaves and inner bark of young shoots are used as an insect repellent, the dried flowering shoots are said to repel insects and rodents. A decoction of the leaves can be used as an insecticide. It is prepared by boiling 3 - 4 handfuls of leaves in a litre of water, then straining and allowing to cool before applying. Effective against many insects, it also treats various fungal infections such as leaf rot and powdery mildew. A black dye is obtained from the bark. When grown near a compost heap, the root activity of this plant encourages fermentation in the compost heap. The stems can be easily hollowed out to be used as drains in tapping the sap from trees such as the Sugar Maples (*Acer* spp). the stems can also be used as whistles and flutes.

References:

A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants, Arnold and Connie Krochmal, Times Books, 1984; ISBN: 0-8129-6336-9

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