

## ELDER, DWARF



*Aralia hispida*

**Family:** Araliaceae

**Names:** Wild elder, bristly sarsaparilla, bristlestem sarsaparilla, Devil's Walkingstick

**Description:** A perennial undershrub plant, with a low stem, from 1 to 2 feet high, the lower part woody and shrubby, thickly beset with sharp stiff bristles, the upper part herbaceous and branching. The leaves are bipinnate, and composed of oblong-ovate, acute, cut-serrate leaflets. The flowers, which are greenish-white, are arranged in numerous umbels which are simple, globose, axillary, and terminal, on long peduncles, and followed by bunches of dark-colored, nauseous berries. It flowers from June to September. The whole plant exhales an unpleasant odor. Grows from New England to Virginia, in fields, hedges,

rocky places, and along the road-sides. The fruit is round, black, one-celled, containing three irregular-shaped seeds. The bark of the plant is employed in medicine, but that of the root is the most active.

**Cultivation:** Prefers a moderately fertile deep moisture-retentive well-drained loam and a position in semi-shade but also succeeds in a sunny position. Requires a sheltered position. Plants are hardier when grown on poorer soils. This species is especially tolerant of poor dry soils. Prefers an acid soil. Dormant plants are hardy to at least 5°F. The young growth in spring, even on mature plants, is frost-tender and so it is best to grow the plants in a position sheltered from the early morning sun. The seed is best sown as soon as ripe in a cold frame. Stored seed requires 3 - 5 months of cold stratification. Germination usually takes place within 1 - 4 months at 68°F. When large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and grow them on in light shade in a greenhouse for at least their first winter. Once the plants are 10 inches or more tall, they can be planted out into their permanent positions, late spring or early summer being the best time to do this. Root cuttings 3 inches long, December in a cold frame. Store the roots upside down in sand and pot up in March/April. High percentage. Division of suckers in late winter. Very easy, the suckers can be planted out direct into their permanent positions if required.

**Properties:** Root, bark, root bark: diuretic, alterative, demulcent, tonic; leaves: diaphoretic

**Medicinal Uses:** Very valuable in dropsy, gravel, suppression of urine, and other urinary disorders. The bark of the root is the strongest,

but that of the stem is also used. It is a relaxant and mild stimulant, acting with but moderate promptness, leaving behind gentle tonic effect, and influencing the kidneys chiefly. A portion of its power is unquestionably expended upon the uterus, and slightly upon the circulation toward the surface; both of which effects have usually been overlooked. It has a slightly warming, bitter taste, and is rather pleasant to the stomach.

It is mostly used in compounds for dropsy, and is one of the best of its class; but for any sub-acute or chronic torpor of the renal organs, with aching back and scanty urine, it is an agent of peculiar value. In high-colored urine, and in chronic aching and weakness of the bladder, it is equally beneficial. It promotes menstruation a little; and is a good adjunct to other remedies in the treatment of mild leucorrhoea, amenorrhoea, and other female disorders. It is generally prepared in decoction, two ounces to the quart; of which two or three fluid ounces may be given three times a day. Used warm, it will promote gentle diaphoresis.

A tea made from the leaves is diaphoretic. An infusion of the root has been used in the treatment of heart diseases.

*Solvent:* water, alcohol

*Dosage* of the decoction of fresh roots and juice for dropsy is 2 to 4 oz. three times daily.

*Compound Syrup.* Crushed *Aralia hispida*, eight ounces; *Liatris spicata* and *fraxinus*, each four ounces; *cimicifuga*, two ounces. Use a solvent of diluted alcohol making into two quarts of syrup. Dosage of this for the treatment of ascites and other forms of dropsy is half a fluid ounce or more three times a day. It is generally advisable to add a small quantity of the tincture of capsicum after the syrup is made; and the use of eight ounces of *chimaphila* with the above ingredients, may be an advantage.

*Homeopathy:* A homeopathic remedy of Wild Elder root is a valuable diuretic, useful in dropsy of the cavities, either due to hepatic or renal disease with constipation. Urinary

disorders, especially with dropsy. Scudder advises doses of five to thirty drops in sweetened cream of tartar solution.

**Culinary Uses:** A tea is made from the roots. The roots are also used for making 'root beer'.

### **Recipes:**

#### **Sarsaparilla Wine**

1½ lbs chopped sarsaparilla leaves

2½ lbs granulated sugar

7½ pts water

½ oz citric acid

1 crushed Campden tablet

1 tsp yeast nutrient

wine yeast

Bring water to boil and stir in sugar until dissolved. Meanwhile, wash leaves, chop coarsely and place in primary. Add citric acid, yeast nutrient and boiling sugar-water. Cover and set aside to achieve room temperature. Stir in crushed Campden tablet, recover and set aside 12 hours. Add activated yeast and recover primary. Stir twice daily for 5 days and strain liquid into secondary. Rack, top up and refit airlock every 30 days until wine clears and no new sediments form over 30-day period. Stabilize, sweeten if desired, wait 10 days, and rack into bottles. May drink immediately, but improves with 6 months aging. Can also use *Smilax aristolochiaefolia* or *Smilax zarzaparrilla*



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