

ELDER



Old Gal; Schwarzer Holunder (German); sureau noir (French); sambreo, sambuco (Italian); sauco (Spanish); busine (Russian); Bez Czarny, Dziki bez czarny (Polish)

Description: Small tree with many small trunks rising directly from the ground. Grows to 30 feet. Flowers are tiny (1/5 inch, white, in large, saucerlike umbels, to 8 inches. Leaves are dull green, divided into slender leaflets to 3 1/2 inches. Fruit are clusters of deep purple-black, round fruit that is juice when ripe. Blooms in June.



Sambucus nigra
[sam-BYOO-kus NY-gruh]
, *S. canadensis*

Family: Caprifoliaceae

Names: Yakori Bengestro, Devil's Eye, Lady Elder, Frau Holle, Rob Elder, Hollunder, Ellhorn, Pipe Tree, Boure Tree, Bour Tree, Sweet Elder, Tree of Doom, Old Lady, Battree,

Cultivation: It is a perennial to Zone 5. Germination is in 10-20 days. Soak seed 2 months at 60-65F, stratify then sprout at 40F. Space 10 feet from each other, or grow smaller herbs beneath it. Soil temperature 65-70F; soil nitrogen-rich, moist or with high water table. pH: 5.5-7.5. Partial shade preferred or full sun. Compost around the base of the plants is ideal for continued health and productivity. Also sow ripe berries 1 inch deep in a pot outdoors. Plant seedlings out in a semi-shaded position when large enough. Usually propagated by cuttings or sometimes root division of young plants. Flowers with the supporting peduncle are harvested as they are just starting to open, usually in early summer. They should never be harvested soon after they have gotten wet as this will cause them to blacken. Flowers are harvested with pruning shears. Fruits with the peduncle are harvested in the fall by hand when they are ripe and juice. A harvest is usually possible the second or third year after planting. Flowers should be dried carefully with as little bruising as possible. Bruised flowers that are stuffed too much while harvested can turn brown. Drying time is 7 to 10 days. Flowers are about 80% water. After drying, if you want just flowers, they are garbled and separated

from the peduncle, which is discarded. The color should be the same yellow-white that existed when they are harvested. The berries are dried with the peduncle in place, so as not to lose juice, and then garbled like the flowers. The fruits are approximately 75% water.

Constituents: Flowers: essential oil, flavonoids (rutin, quercetin), phenolic acids, triterpenes, sterols, mucilage, tannins, alkaloids, anthocyanins, vitamin C. Berries: flavonoids, sugar, fruit acid, vitamins A and C.

Energetics: Flowers/Berries: bitter, drying, cool, slightly sweet; bark is hot, bitter and drying

Meridians/Organs affected: lungs, liver (flowers)

History: The origin of the generic name is not clear; it may either have Aegean or Etruscan roots or it may refer to an ancient wind instrument, the sambuca. Elder has been used at least since the ancient Egyptians discovered that applying its flowers improved the complexion and healed burns. The ancient Romans also used elder. Called "the medicine chest of the country people" by Europeans, elder has a rich folklore. Mandrake is probably the only herb that has more stories associated with it.

Legend has it that Judas Iscariot was hung from gallows made of elder and that the cross on which Christ died was of the same wood. Therefore, it was never used in the construction of such things as baby cradles. In England, elders were frequently planted near cottages to protect the inmates from lightning and from witches; elder branches were nailed over barns and stables, often in the form of a cross, to ward off evil influences; and the drivers of hearses carried whips of elder wood as a protection against spirits and death, while branches of elder were buried in graves to protect the dead themselves from evil spirits.

In Russia, the peasants believed that the elder was proof against bad spirits, and the Serbs carried a piece of elder at weddings for

good luck. It was thought that a child beaten with an elder twig would be dwarfed, and that the tree was narcotic and dangerous to sleep under. Another belief was that an elder tree would only flourish near a house in which happy people lived. In Bohemia, a spell recited before an elder tree was believed to cure fever. In many parts of England, knots made from elder twigs were carried as charms against rheumatism.

Bad luck will surely come your way if your burn green elder. In parts of England, it was believed that doing so would invite the Devil to enter your house through the chimney. Elder wood will cause a fire in the fireplace to die out if placed upon it. You must apologize three times to an elder when pruning it or cutting it down, otherwise bad luck will befall you. A wound caused by an elder bush is fatal. Furniture made of elder wood is unlucky and elder sticks brought into the house will cause illness in the family and misfortune. On the other hand it offers protection against all forms of evil, saddle sores and lightning. And the leaves repel hexes and curses when they are gathered on the last day of April and worn or carried as a charm. To see elder in a dream is an omen of sickness in the near future.

Medicinal: Key actions: Flowers: expectorant, reduces phlegm, circulatory stimulant, promote sweating, diuretic, topically anti-inflammatory; Berries: promote sweating, diuretic, laxative; Bark: purgative, promotes vomiting, diuretic; topically--emollient. The berries help coughs, colic, sore throats, asthma and flu. A pinch of cinnamon makes the tea more warming. The berries have also been taken for rheumatism and erysipelas. They are mildly laxative and also help diarrhea.

The flowers are infused for fevers, eruptive skin conditions such as measles and severe bronchial and lung problems. The infusion is relaxing and produces a mild perspiration that helps to reduce fever. The flowering tops tone the mucous linings of the nose and throat, increasing their resistance to infection. They are prescribed for chronic congestion, allergies, ear infections and

candidiasis. Infusions of the flowering tops and other herbs can reduce the severity of hay fever attacks if taken for some months before the onset of the hay fever season. A classic flu remedy is a mixture of elderflower, yarrow and peppermint teas.

By encouraging sweating and urine production, elder flowering tops promote the removal of waste products from the body and are of value in arthritic conditions.

The specific compounds in elder flowers have not been well established for the diuretic and laxative properties. The compound sambuculin A and a mixture of alpha- and beta-amyrin palmitate have been found to exhibit strong antihepatotoxic activity against liver damage induced experimentally by carbon tetrachloride.

The bark's energetics are bitter and toxic. Only bark that has been aged for a year or more should be used or cyanide poisoning may result. The Western species are more toxic.

This herb has two compounds that are active against flu viruses. It also prevents the virus from invading respiratory tract cells. A patented Israeli drug (Sambucol) that contains elderberry is active against various strains of viruses. It also stimulated the immune system and has shown some activity in preliminary trials against other viruses, such as Epstein-Barr, herpes and even HIV.

APPLICATIONS:

Flower infusion: drink hot for feverish and mucous conditions of the lungs or upper respiratory tract, including hay fever. Can be combined with yarrow, boneset and peppermint
Flower Tincture: take for colds and influenza, or in early spring to help reduce later hay fever symptoms

Flower Cream: apply to chapped skin and sores on the hands or to chilblains

Flower Eyewash: use the cold, strained infusion for inflamed or sore eyes

Flower Mouthwash/gargle: use the infusion for mouth ulcers, sore throats and tonsillitis

Berry Syrup: make from the decoction and take as a prophylactic for winter colds or in

combination with other expectorant herbs, such as thyme for coughs.

Berry Tincture: use in combination with other herbs, such as bogbean or willow for rheumatic conditions.

HOMEOPATHIC: Used for conditions accompanied by profuse perspiration and suffocative coughs that are worse around midnight.

CAUTIONS: Do not use the bark in pregnancy as it is very strongly purgative

Cosmetic: Elder flowers in cosmetics and skin washes refine the complexion and help relieve eczema and psoriasis. It also makes a gentle and soothing eyebath for strained and tired eyes. Used regularly, it helps to bleach freckles.

Recipes:

Elderflower Water

5 cups elderflowers; 1 1/4 cups boiling water

Pick the blossoms when fully open, but still fresh. Snip away all the little stalks. Measure the flowers into a bowl, pour on the boiling water, cover and leave to infuse for two or three hours. Strain into a jug and pour into small bottles.

Honeyed Yogurt Cleansing Cream

16 Tbsp natural yogurt

5 Tbsp washed elderflower heads

2 1/2 Tbsp clear honey, melted

Place the yogurt and elderflower heads in a pan on a very low heat and simmer for thirty minutes. Remove from the heat and leave to steep for five hours. Then reheat the mixture, strain and add the melted honey. Whip together for several minutes, bottle, label and refrigerate. Apply generously over face and neck and clean off with cotton balls.

Elder hand cream

Heat a pot of petroleum jelly until it liquefies. Pour into a saucepan and add to it several handfuls of fresh elder flowers. Leave for about 40 minutes, gently reheating as it cools.

Pout through a sieve while still warm and pour the liquid into jars to solidify. Rub on the hands at bedtime and sleep in an old pair of cotton gloves.

Complexion Milk

Blanch 4 oz sweet almonds and remove the skins. Place in a mortar and pound, using a pint of elder flower water to create a thin emulsion. Put through a muslin sieve, allowing it plenty of time to run through. In a separate pan over a very low flame, place a cupful of elder flower water and into it shave a small tablet of white soap, stirring until it melts. Then slowly add 1/2 each spermaceti and white beeswax. This allows time for their partial saponification by the soap. Place the mixture in the mortar and allow the almond emulsion to trickle into it very slowly, blending it carefully. With equal care, work in 1/2 pint of alcohol, strain and bottle.

Elderflower Anti-Dandruff Hair Rinse

4 handfuls fresh elderflowers
2 pints water
2 pints cider vinegar

Boil the elderflowers in the water, cover and simmer for ten minutes. Remove from the heat and infuse for an hour. Strain and add the cider vinegar. Bottle. Leave for 48 hours before use. After washing your hair, add half a pint to the final rinse water.

Kaolin Foot Powder

3 1/2 oz kaolin
1 oz rice flour
1 oz club moss spores
1 oz elder leaves
1 oz sage leaves
50 drops peppermint oil
30 drops thyme oil

Put the sage and elder leaves in a blender and run it for a minute at low speed and a minute at high speed. Using a fine, mesh sieve, strain the resulting powder two tablespoons at a time and use only the finest part. Put all the ingredients in a bottle, jar or plastic container and shake them. Add the essential oil using a dropper and shake the

mixture as you go. Massage small quantities into the feet or dust socks or shoes with it. (Natural Beauty)

Elder after shave lotion

Pour 1 pint of boiling water onto 2 large handfuls of elder flowers placed in a bowl. Allow to soak for 12 hours, strain and bottle. Keep under refrigeration.

Household: Native Americans used flexible, hollow elder stems in basketmaking. The black elder can be used as an insecticide in the garden or to repel insects from the face and body. A simple infusion of the fresh leaf is made for this purpose. It can also be poured down mouse and mole holes.

Berries produce a deep blue dye, the leaves a green dye and the bark and roots a black dye. For Leaves: mordant--alum gives light yellow, chrome gives deep yellow. Young leaves give a purer color than older ones. Put 1 lb leaves in cold water and heat slowly. Simmer for 1/2 to 1 hour. Strain off the leaves and cool the liquor. Enter the clean, wetted wool and return to the simmer. Simmer for 15-30 minutes. Rinse the wool twice and dry.

For Berries: mordant--alum gives violet which can be modified by adding salt to the dyebath or by a vinegar dip. Put 2 lb berries in cold water and heat slowly. Simmer for 1/2 to 1 hour. Strain off the berries and cool the liquor. Enter the clean, wetted wool and return bath to the simmer. Simmer for 1/2 hour or longer according to the depth of color desired. Leave the wool to steep in the bath overnight. Make more blue by adding a handful of salt to the bath while the wool is steeping overnight.

For Bark: mordant--iron gives gray. Put 2 lb bark in cold water and heat slowly. Simmer for 2 hours. Strain off the bark and cool the liquor. Enter the clean, wetted wool and return bath to the simmer. Simmer for 1-2 hours. Rinse the wool twice and dry.

Ritual Uses: Gender: cold; Planet: Venus; Element: Air; Associated Deities: Hold, Venus; Basic Powers: Purification and Love. The

branches are often used for fashioning magic wands. Panpipes are made of elder stems. A dryad "Elder Mother" is said to live in the tree; she will haunt anyone who cuts down her wood. Stand or sleep under an elder on Midsummer Eve to see the King of the Fairies and his retinue pass by. The flowers are used in wish-fulfillment spells. The leaves, flowers and berries are strewn on a person, place or thing to bless it.

ANTI-THEFT SACHET

2 parts rosemary
1 part juniper
1 part caraway seeds
1 part elder
1 pinch garlic

Tie up in white cloth and hang over the front door to protect the home and its contents.

LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS: Compassion; jealousy

Culinary: The flowers have a pleasant scent and go well with fruit salads, jellies and aromatized vinegars; they also possess a large amount of strongly scented nectar that can be used for making refreshing drinks. Flowers are eaten raw or turned into fritters and the young buds can be pickled. The flowers are attractive floating in a punch bowl. The fruit is turned into a variety of jams, jellies, and preserves, as well as elderberry wine. It contains more vitamin C than any herb, except rosehips and black currant.

Recipes:

Elderberry Soup

1½ lb elderberries
¾ oz cornflour
4 oz sugar
grated rind of ½ lemon
2 pints water

Place the elderberries and lemon rind in the water and simmer until tender. Stir in the sugar and remove from the heat. Blend the cornflour with a little water to form a smooth paste. Gradually add this to the soup, then

bring back to the boil stirring continuously until it thickens. (Nature's Wild Harvest)

Elderberry Pickle

1 lb elderberries
1 small onion
2 Tbsp sugar
½ pint vinegar
½ tsp ground ginger
½ tsp mixed spice
pinch of salt

Place the elderberries in a pan and mash them well. Chop the onion and add with all the other ingredients to the berries. Bring to the boil and simmer slowly until the mixture thickens. Stir continuously to stop the mixture sticking to the pan. Pour immediately into hot sterilized jars and seal. (Nature's Wild Harvest)

Elderflower crepes

1 cup sifted flour
a pinch of salt
1 stripped head of elderflowers
1 tsp sugar
½ tsp grated orange peel
2 eggs
1¼ cups milk
2 Tbsp melted butter
juice of 1 orange
melted honey

Mix together the flour, salt, elderflowers, sugar and orange peel. Add the eggs, beat well, then gradually add the milk, beating all the time. Leave to stand for at least 30 minutes. Stir in the melted butter. Grease a heavy pan and heat until it is very hot. Using a tablespoonful of batter for each, cook the pancakes, tipping the pan, until the pancake is thin, lacy and patterned with gold. Turn over and cook the other side. Pile on a hot plate above the oven. Roll up each pancake and sprinkle with orange juice and melted honey. Whole elderflower heads can be dipped in batter and fried as fritters. (The Complete Book of Herbs and Spices)

Elderflower Muffins

1 cup unbleached flour, sifted
2 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 ½ cups elderflowers
2 Tbsp sweet (unsalted) butter, melted
1 egg, beaten
½ cup buttermilk
½ cup orange juice

Preheat oven to 400F. Sift together dry ingredients into a bowl. Toss in flowers. In a separate bowl, mix butter, egg, buttermilk and orange juice. Add wet mixture to dry, stirring only until dry ingredients are moistened. Grease muffin tins. Fill each cup 2/3 with batter. Bake 20-25 minutes until muffins are lightly brown. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

Irish Soda Elderberry Bread

1/3 cup vegetable oil or butter
2/3 cup orange juice
4 eggs
8 cups whole-wheat bread flour
2 tsp salt
¾ tsp baking soda
½ Tbsp cream of tartar
2 tsp dried crushed lemon balm or mint
3 cups buttermilk or yogurt
1-2 cups fresh or reconstituted dried elderberries
¼ cup caraway seeds.

Preheat the oven to 375F. Mix the butter or oil with the fruit juice. Beat in the eggs. In a separate bowl sift together the flour, salt, baking soda, cream of tartar, and mint. Alternately add the buttermilk and the flour mixture to the egg mixture until well mixed. Don't overmix. Add the elderberries and caraway. Bake in 3 8½ x4 ½ -inch baking dishes for 60-70 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Remove from the pans and cool on racks. This bread freezes well. (Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places)

Elderberry Jam

4 cups of just ripened elderberries, stripped from stems and washed
2 cups apples, cored and chopped with their skins
½ tsp salt
½ cup orange juice
2-4 cups sugar

Put the elderberries, apples, salt and orange juice in an enamel or stainless-steel saucepan, bring to a boil and simmer uncovered 20 to 30 minutes. Mash the cooked fruit through a colander or coarse strainer. Measure the puree and add 1 1/2 cups of sugar to each cup of puree. Return the sweetened puree to the saucepan and cook over low heat, stirring constantly for 15 to 20 minutes. Pour the jam into sterilized jars or glasses and cover with paraffin if you don't intend to use all the jam within a month. (The Wild Gourmet)

Elderflower and Gooseberry Iced Cream

2 1/2 cups elderflowers when sniped from their stalks and gently pressed down--about 6-8 umbels
1 lb gooseberries
2 cups granulated sugar
1¼ cups water
juice of ½ lemon
1¼ cups thick cream

Shake the flowers free of insects and snip away the stalks. Top and tail the gooseberries and wash them under the tap. Heat the sugar and water in a saucepan, stirring continuously, then boil fast for 3 minutes. Add the gooseberries and lemon juice to the hot syrup, bring again to the boil and cook for 5 minutes. Draw the pan off the heat and add the elderflowers, stir, cover the pan, and leave until quite cold. Scoop out the elderflowers and put the gooseberry mixture through a fine sieve or food mill. Pour into cartons or tubs, cover with lids or foil and freeze until slushy. Scrape the mixture into a bowl and beat until smooth with a wooden spoon. Whip the cream lightly and stir into the gooseberry slush. Return to the containers, cover and freeze until firm. Transfer to the main part of the refrigerator half

an hour before serving. (All Good Things Around Us)

Elderberry-Blackberry Betterment

2 quarts elderberries
2 quarts blackberries
2 quarts water
2 cups brown sugar
ginger and cloves (optional)
2 cups brandy

Place the cleaned berries together in a large pot with water. Simmer over low heat to extract the juice, crushing and stirring regularly, for 30 minutes. Strain off juice into another pot. Rewarm the liquid and dissolve the sugar in it. Add any spices you like at this point, and boil for 15 minutes. Cool and add brandy before bottling. (Magical attributes: any rite for Pan, connection to nature, health and well-being). (A Witch's Brew)

Euell Gibbons' Wild Elderberry Candy Bar

1½ cups of dried elderberries
5 Tbs confectioner sugar
1 pt jar cream peanut butter
1 15 oz can condensed milk
2 Tbsp vanilla

In large mixing bowl, mix peanut butter and sugar. Add milk and vanilla. Mix until candy can be formed into logs. Add elderberries. Mix again and wrap logs in aluminum foil. Freeze until ready to use.

Elderberry Wine

3 lb elderberries, stripped from stems
1½ gallons water
To each gallon of liquid allow the following:
1 lb raisins
½ oz ground ginger
6 cloves
½ tsp all-purpose wine yeast
¼ pt brandy

Put the berries in a plastic container. Boil the water, pour it over the berries and leave to stand for a day. Bruise the berries and press the liquid through a plastic sieve or muslin cloth over another container.

Measure the juice and place in a preserving pan with all the other ingredients except the yeast and brandy. Boil gently for an hour, skimming when necessary. Put in a bucket and leave to stand until necessary. Put in a bucket and leave to stand until lukewarm, then stir in the yeast and cover. Leave for two weeks without disturbing. Strain, then add the brandy and pour into containers, corking tightly. Allow to rest for six months in a cool, dry place, then bottle off the wine, making sure the sediment remains behind. Cork and store. The wine can be drunk now, but is infinitely improved by keeping as long as your will power holds out. (Food from the Countryside)

Venison Steaks with Elderberry and Orange

4 venison tenderloin steaks, 6-8 oz each
olive oil for basting
black pepper
salt
2 Tbsp red wine
4 Tbsp orange juice, plus slices of orange to garnish
2 Tbsp elderberry jelly
sprigs of parsley, to garnish

Pound the venison steaks a little with a meat mallet to make the meat more tender. Preheat the broiler. Brush with olive oil and season with freshly ground black pepper. Broil under a high heat until done to your taste. Sprinkle with a little salt. In a pan, reduce the red wine, then add the orange juice and elderberry jelly and simmer for 10 minutes. Pour over the steaks and garnish with slices of orange and parsley sprigs. (The Encyclopedia of Herbs and Spices)

Hydromel

1 oz elder flowers
½ oz orris root
1 oz crushed almonds
1 cup brandy
3 1/5 oz honey
1 quart water

Steep the elder flowers, orris root and almonds in the brandy for 3 days. Separately dissolve the honey in the warmed water, and add the brandy and herbs. Filter, cover, and

leave in a warm place for 2 weeks. Filter once more before bottling. (Mastering Herbalism)

Elderberry Liqueur

4 cups fresh elderberries, picked over and washed
2 cups sugar
1 tsp lemon zest
2 Tbsp fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1 cup water
3 cups 100-proof vodka

Crush elderberries and sugar together in bowl. Let stand for about 1 hour. Add lemon zest and lemon juice. Transfer to clean 2-quart container and add water and vodka. Cover and let stand in a cool, dark place for 1 month, shaking occasionally. Use a fine-mesh strainer to strain out solids. Discard. Transfer liqueur to clean container. Cover and age for at least 1 month before serving. (Cordials From Your Kitchen)

Pink Elderflower Champagne

3 heads of elderflower in full bloom
1¼ cups black currants, fresh or frozen and thawed
2 Tbsp wine vinegar
3½ cups sugar
5 quarts cold water
6 champagne or sparkling wine bottles plus corks and wires

Cut the large stems from the heads of elderflower and put the blossom in a large bowl or bucket. Add the black currants, the vinegar, and the sugar. Pour in the cold water and stir well. Cover the bowl with a cloth and set aside for 24 hours, stirring the mixture from time to time to release the juice from the fruit. Next day, strain the liquid into bottles and cork and wire them securely. Store the bottles on their sides in a cool, dark place for 2-3 weeks. The wine is ready when the corks start to rise in the wires. (Geraldene Holt's Complete Book of Herbs)

Elderflower Sparkler

3½ cups superfine sugar
2 cups hot water
4 large fresh elderflower heads

2 Tbsp white wine vinegar
juice and pared rind of 1 lemon
8½ pints water, heated almost to boiling

Mix the sugar with the hot water. Pour the mixture into a large glass or plastic container. Add all the remaining ingredients. Stir well, cover and leave for about 5 days. Strain off the liquid into sterilized screw-top bottles (glass or plastic). Leave for a further week or so. Serve very cold with slivers of lemon rind. (The Complete Book of Herbs)

Elderflower Milkshake

4 umbels elderflowers
1¼ cups milk
1 egg
½ Tsp honey
¼ tsp ground cinnamon

Snip the stalks from the flowers and put them with the milk in a pan, simmer gently for 5 minutes, then draw off the heat and allow to cool a little. Meanwhile separate the egg, and cream the yolk and honey in a bowl with the cinnamon. Pour the flower-flavored milk through a strainer over the egg mixture and whisk until frothy. When the liquid is nearly cold stir in the stiffly whisked egg white. Pour into a large tumbler or mug and chill thoroughly. (All Good Things Around Us)

Pontac Catsup

¾ lb elderberries
1 pint wine vinegar
25 black peppercorns
12 cloves
a piece of bruised ginger root
1 mace blade
2 chopped shallots
½ tsp salt

Bake the elderberries and vinegar overnight in a very low oven, in a covered pot. Strain the liquid, stir in the spices and flavorings and bring slowly to a boil. Boil for 5 minutes, then bottle in sterilized bottles. Use to flavor soups and gravies. (The Complete Book of Herbs and Spices)

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