



# Elderberry

*Sambucus*

Honeysuckle Family (Caprifoliaceae)

Zones: 5-8

Full Sun to Partial Shade

Moderate Water

Location: Childrens' Garden, Floral Walk, Herb Garden, Medicinal Garden, Rose Garden, Visitor Center

*Sambucus* or Elderberry is a plant I'm becoming more and more fond of, mainly because there is a wide selection of cultivars available that offer a variety of foliage textures, foliage colors and flower colors, not to mention colorful berries. One of my absolute favorites is *S. ebulus*, located in the Medicinal Garden. Its large problem-free foliage and large creamy flower heads is breathtaking - one of those must-see plants in the Garden. Other great varieties include *S. nigra* 'Black Beauty' which has dark purplish-black foliage and pink flowers and *S. racemosa* 'Sutherland Gold' which has finely cut gold foliage, both of which are located in the Floral Walk just below the Pear Arbors. *S. nigra* 'Laciniata' has green cutleaf foliage and is located in front of the Visitor Center.

Elderberries are considered large multi-stemmed shrubs. Some species can get quite large and weedy, *S. nigra* can reach 20' or more. Choosing a named cultivar is a wise precaution; even then, the cultivars can reach heights of 8' to 12'. Yearly pruning is usually necessary to keep them from getting out of hand. Elderberries tolerate a wide variety of soil types and soil pH; they prefer moist soils but tolerate drier soils.

The berries of Elderberries are generally held to be edible. One source however (Gregory L. Tilford, *Edible and Medicinal Plants of the West*) states that red-berried forms are so high in hydrocyanic acid that they should not be eaten. The blue-berried forms contain lesser amounts of hydrocyanic acid and thus are better for consumption in moderation. Straining out the seeds or thoroughly cooking the berries can reduce hydrocyanic acid, which can cause nausea or diarrhea when consumed in large quantities. The berries can be eaten fresh but are typically bitter; they are better used in jams, pies, muffins and wines. They are also high in vitamin C.

The honey-scented flowers do not contain hydrocyanic acid and are edible as well. They can be used in teas, battered and fried in fritters, or added to muffins.