

Elderberry

Elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis* is a medium to large shrub in the *Caprifoliaceae*, or honeysuckle, family. It is clonal forming and produces dense thickets when it is in its preferred habitat. It does occasionally become tree-like in stature (15 feet). The branches are weak and tend to be arching, especially when they are heavy with fruit.

Its preferred habitat is wet hammocks, shallow ponds, along streams, margins of swamps & disturbed sites. It can be grown in the home landscape with a little extra watering, or maybe not. Don Robinson grows his elderberry in the sandhills of Spring Hill and has it attain almost champion size. So, don't be afraid to try it in locations other than its preferred habitat.

Its leaves are opposite and pinnately compound. The leaflets are toothed and found in numbers of 5-9. The lower leaves may be trifoliate.

The small white flowers are born in flat topped clusters, and bloom all year, however, their peak blooming time seems to be summer. The flowers can be used in pancake and fritter recipes once the stems have been removed.

The small black berries hang in clusters, and are eaten by birds and mammals. They are eaten by humans as well, and are used for making pies, jellies, jams, and wines. They can also be used as a substitute for raisins in bread pudding recipes. The unripe berries, bark, root, and leaves can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea and should not be ingested. The fruit and flowers should be cooked first if they are going to be consumed in large quantities. The berries are rich in Vitamin C, and also contain Vitamin A, calcium, iron, and potassium.

By Sharon LaPlante



Foster, Steven and J. A. Duke. *Peterson Field Guides: Medicinal Plants*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston 1990

Godfrey, R.K., and J.W. Wooten. *Aquatic and Wetland Plants of the Southeastern United States: Monocots and Dicots*. University of Georgia Press: Athens, GA 1981

Peterson, Lee A. *Peterson Field Guides: Edible Plants*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston 1977

Radford, Albert E., H. E. Ahles and C. R. Bell. *Manual of Vascular Flora of the Carolinas*. University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill, NC. 1964