



AMERICAN ELDER
Sambucus canadensis L.
HONEYSUCKLE FAMILY

Botanical name: *Sambucus nigra*

Family: Caprifoliaceae [including valerian, bush honeysuckle, snowberry, beauty bush]

Common name: Elder

More names: elderberry, elderflower, sweet Elder, black elder, pipe tree, bore tree, flor de saúco, saúco, azumiate, guarico, negrito, tapiro [Spanish], Xumetl, [Nahuatl] Tlsolos-che [Mayan]

Parts of the plant used: flower, berry, leaf

When to harvest: Flowers: ready around late May to mid-June; Berry: harvested in their second season, between mid-August-mid September when dark purple

Herbal actions:

Leaf: purgative, expectorant, diuretic, diaphoretic, alterative, emollient, emetic (internal); embodiment, vulnerary, astringent; Flower: diaphoretic, anticatarrhal, antispasmodic, emollient; Berry: diaphoretic, diuretic, laxative, antirheumatic, antiviral, antifungal, purgative, alterative, astringent, emetic

Active constituents:

Flower: triterpenes, fixed oils, phenolic acids, pectin, sugars; Leaf: triterpenes, cyanogenic glycosides including quercetin, kaempferol, hyperoside, fatty acids, alkanes, tannins; Berry: vitamin C, vitamin A, iron, calcium, potassium

Habitat + ecology:

Sambucus nigra, one of 26 varieties, is native to a large area of North America east of the Rocky Mountains, and south through eastern Mexico and Central America to Panama. This plant ancestor grows in both wet and dry soils, but mostly in sunny locations. The oldest presence of elder is found in Egypt.

Planet: Venus

Element: Water

Energy: Cooling, Drying

Taste: Bitter, Acid

Meridians/organ affected: lung, liver

Ethnobotany (People + the plant ancestor):

- Elder dates back to ancient Egyptian civilizations. A legend names that elder tree was the plant ancestor that Christ was crucified on.
- In African slave medicine elder was used to support the common cold, sores, and chills.
- Many indigenous communities of Mexico work with elder as a poultice for headaches, nosebleeds, wounds, and skin ulcers.
- Turtle Island native people have a long + well documented their-story of working with elder
 - Cherokees use elderberry teas and strong infusions for responding to rheumatism, and elderflower tea as a diaphoretic.
 - Chickasaw use branch infusions applied topically for headaches, and over bruises and wounds to drain abscesses and relieve discomfort from infections.
 - Creek healers stirred pounded Elder roots into hot water and poulticed them onto swollen breasts for relief.
 - Lenape reportedly used elderflower decoctions for children's colic, and elderberry decoctions for jaundice and liver complaints
- Elderberry has also been used culturally: twigs and fruit are used in creating dyes for basketry; branches were used to make the shaft of arrows.

Plant magick:

- "Holy Tree"
- Restoring + keeping good health
- Promotes longevity
- Bridge the divide between the physical and the spiritual realm
- Serves as a gateway guardian: strength + protection, darkness + light
- Power from duality
- Hope
- Protective [Hoodoo]
- Sticks used to drive away negative energies + spirits
- Ward off, and also summon in negative energies
- Connected to the gatekeepers of the underworld + death
- Often used in blessing rituals

Form: spirit, dried leaves/flowers/roots, branches spirit bath

Medicinal uses:

- Comrade to the respiratory + immune system
 - Supporting the common cold influenza, reduce fevers, and chills + sore throats
 - Treats bronchitis + pulmonary infections, such as measles + scarlet fever
 - Reduces symptoms of fever 3-4 days
 - Combats 10 strains of influenza
- Beneficial for inflammatory cases of the genitourinary and gastrointestinal tracts, including the kidneys
- Treats swollen breasts by applying ground up roots on area
- Care for stomach aches, gas, constipation [the latter made with the bark]
- Treats rheumatoid arthritis + sciatica
- Skin support, including clearing to pimples, blackheads, whiteheads, boils, including eczema + jaundice
- Supportive to children: fevers, chills, colic, intestinal gas
- Blood purifier + heart toning [leaves + stem]
- Relieves internal pain [bark decoction] + headaches [bark as poultice]
- Topically for bruises, sprains, wounds, chilblains, external tumors, unhealed baby navel [oily, salve, poultice]
- Wash used to prevent infections [externally]
- Flowers can be used in lotion to clear the complexion of freckles

***Contraindications:** Elder leaves, twigs, branches, seeds, and roots contain cyanide-inducing glycosides, ingesting them in large quantities can cause a toxic buildup of cyanide in the body; Discontinue use if your stomach feels irritated [vomiting, nausea]

Recipes + Comrades

Colds, coughs [antiviral]: mints, evergreens, yarrow, licorice, echinacea, rose

Clearing to the skin: sassafras

Food as medicine: pie, fermented to make WINE

Preparation:

infusion, herbal tisane/tea, tincture, elixir, glycerin, poultice, oil, salve, compress, sitz bath

2-4 dropperfuls 3x a day for acute conditions

Native story with elder:

"In one Miwok legend, *How Tol-le-loo Stole Fire*, Tol-le-loo has an elderberry flute that he takes with him to a village. Tol-le-loo has the intention of stealing the villager's fire; to further his goal, he plays his flute and all of the villagers start to fall asleep. Wit-ta-bah, a robin, sees what is happening and spreads his wings over embers to protect it, but the flute eventually puts Wit-ta-bah to sleep as well. Tol-le-loo cuts a hole in Wit-ta-bah's wing to get at the fire, steals the fire embers, and puts the fire in his flute for safekeeping while he climbs up to the top of a mountain. The fire stays in the flute till he takes it out."

Photos of the plant ancestor:



Elderberries!



Elder leaf



Elder flower