

## **It's time to "Respect your Elder" – 2013 Herb of the Year**

The International Herb Association (IHA) has designated the elderberry as the official Herb of the Year for 2013. IHA chose the plant because it has a long history as a medicinal herb, as well as its use in cooking and in a variety of crafts. Because of elderberry's reputation for possibly lowering cholesterol, syrups and extracts have gained in popularity in recent years. You can learn more about the Herb of the Year and this very useful herb by visiting the IHA website ([iherb.org](http://iherb.org)) and the Herb Society of America website ([herbsociety.org](http://herbsociety.org)). Both organizations publish an Herb of the Year book with recipes and uses.

Elderberries are highly adaptable, hardy to Zone 4, and can be found across much of the United States and into Canada. Related varieties are found in Europe, as well. While you will find the plant growing in damp ditches and along roadsides, it will grow in average garden soil as well. Plants thrive in both full sun and part shade.

### **In the Landscape**

Elderberry is an excellent addition to the edible landscape. Grown at the back of the garden or even as a specimen plant in the yard, the masses of white flowers are a delight. The flowers bloom in clusters, often 12-16 inches across that attract a wide variety of butterflies and pollinating bees. Clusters of blue-black berries follow and often the plant will have both flowers and berries at the same time for many weeks. Birds also like the ripe berries and may get to them before the gardener does, but because the berries are produced in such profusion, there's usually enough for all.

### **Recipes**

You can easily make your own elderberry syrup to use for pancakes, or for treating a cold or flu. It's a tasty, fruity syrup for adding to water over ice for a summer drink, or a couple of teaspoons added to a cup of hot water makes a delicious winter drink, too. Note: the berries freeze well for use later.

### **Elderberry Syrup**

1 1/2 cups freshly-picked berries (or substitute 3/4 cup dried organic berries)

3 1/4 cups water

1 1/4 cups honey - raw, local honey if available

1 3-inch cinnamon stick

3-4 whole cloves

1 large piece candied ginger (or substitute 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger)

1 - Combine everything but the honey and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce heat and slowly simmer for about 25 minutes.

2 - Using a potato masher, crush the berries and set aside to cool for several hours.

3 - Strain, discarding solids, then add the honey and mix to dissolve.

This makes approximately 4 cups of syrup and can be stored in the refrigerator for about 8 weeks. This can also be frozen in ice cube trays for longer storage and taken out as needed.

## **Medicinal Uses**

Elderberry has a reputation in treating bruises, skin conditions, headaches, flu, sore throat and coughing. Hippocrates is quoted as having said the elderberry bush was his “medicine chest.” The extract, sold commercially as Sambucus Extract is claimed to lower cholesterol, due to the plant’s claimed antioxidant activities, although much more research needs to be conducted. A few studies have suggested that elderberry may be helpful in treating bacterial sinus infections and bronchitis. Some studies suggest 1 tablespoon of elderberry syrup four times a day is helpful in fighting the flu. Elderberry lozenges, combined with zinc, are also said to be helpful once a cold begins.

## **Cautions**

Never eat or drink any product made from **RAW** elderberry fruit, flowers or leaves. All parts of the plant are sometimes listed as poisonous. (Note: while some references list raw elderberry as poisonous, it is due to the potential for vomiting and nausea. While it is not recommended to try not-ripe berries, the berries are not a serious poison unless lots were eaten, and that is prevented by the fact they simply taste awful; you would not mistakenly eat more than one).