

## *Sambucus canadensis* (American elder, Elderberry)



Hardiness Zones: 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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**Botanical Name:** *Sambucus canadensis* sam-BOO-kus kan-ah-DEN-sis  **Common Name:** American elder, Elderberry **Genus:** *Sambucus*

A familiar native shrub, American elderberry is commonly seen along streambanks and roadsides and in moist woodlands and thickets throughout eastern North America. It has pinnate leaves with toothed leaflets and small white flowers borne in large flattened clusters in summer. Purple-black, round fruit comes next, attracting wildlife to the garden. Elderberries typically grow to about 12 feet high, but they tolerate pruning to a smaller size. Fruit is edible when cooked.

**Noteworthy characteristics:** Elderberry is native to eastern North America. It's a good wildlife plant, with its numerous white flowers in summer and purple-black berries in late summer and fall. All parts of the plant can cause severe discomfort if eaten, but fruit is safe when cooked.

**Care:** Grow in average, medium to wet, humusy soil in full sun to part shade. Prune out dead or weakened stems in early spring. Can be hard pruned if needed to restrict size.

**Propagation:** Sow seed in containers in autumn in an open frame. Take hardwood cuttings in winter or greenwood cuttings in early summer. Colonizes by root suckers.

**Problems:** Powdery mildew, canker and dieback, rust, virus diseases, fungal leaf spots, borers.

<b>Height</b>	10 ft. to 15 ft.
<b>Spread</b>	10 ft. to 15 ft.
<b>Growth Pace</b>	Moderate Grower
<b>Light</b>	Full Sun to Part Shade
<b>Moisture</b>	Medium to Wet
<b>Maintenance</b>	Moderate
<b>Characteristics</b>	Attracts Birds; Attracts Butterflies; Native; Showy Flowers; Showy Foliage; Showy Fruit
<b>Bloom Time</b>	Summer
<b>Flower Color</b>	White Flower
<b>Uses</b>	Beds and Borders, Roadside, Screening, Waterside
<b>Seasonal Interest</b>	Summer Interest, Fall Interest
<b>Type</b>	Shrubs

Taken from:  
[www.finegardening.com](http://www.finegardening.com)

## AMERICAN ELDER

*Sambucus nigra* L. ssp. *canadensis*  
(L.) R. Bolli  
Plant Symbol = SANIC4

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



Robert H. Mohlenbrock  
USDA, NRCS 1989  
Midwest Wetland Flora  
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**Warning:** New growth of American elder contains a glucoside than can be fatal to livestock.

### Alternate Names

*Sambucus canadensis* L., common elderberry

### Uses

At least 50 species of songbirds, upland game birds, and small mammals relish the fruit of American elder during summer and early fall. White-tailed deer browse the twigs, foliage and fruit during the summer. American elder is outstanding as nesting cover for small birds. During summer, the partial shade under American elder promotes a dense ground cover of grasses and forbs that offers good loafing or feeding areas for broods of young pheasants and quail.

American elder can be used for erosion control on moist sites. It pioneers on some strip-mine spoils and may occasionally be useful for reclamation planting.

It is very decorative when in bloom; elder flowers later than most shrubs. Elderberries are also attractive to makers of pies, jellies and wine.

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Description and Adaptation

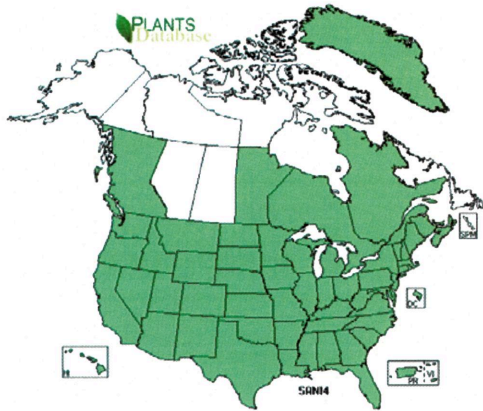
The American elder is an erect, thicket-forming, somewhat woody shrub, 4-12 feet tall, with smooth yellowish-gray branchlets and white pith. Compound leaves are set oppositely in pairs in a feather-like arrangement. The leaf surface is bright green. The oval to lance-shaped leaflets are up to 6" long and 2 1/2" wide, with finely serrated margins. They are abruptly narrowed at the tip and lopsidedly narrowed or rounded at the base. Leaflets are usually held on short stalks; the terminal leaflet is on a longer stalk.

Numerous 1/4" fragrant white flowers emerge from late June into August. The terminal clusters of flowers, measuring 4"-10" across, are broad, flat or slightly rounded and long-stalked. Flowers usually develop in the second-year on older canes, and are arranged in branched clusters of 5.

Fruits ripen from late July into September. They are round, slightly bitter, edible purple-black berries with crimson juice. Each is less than 1/4" across, borne in large clusters. Each berry contains 3-5 small seeds. Seed dispersal occurs from July to October, usually through vigorous ingestion by birds and mammals. There are about 230,000 seeds per pound.

American elder occupies well-drained, slightly acid soil bordering streams, and in the adjacent bottomlands, but also grows on gray forest soils and muck. This shrub is widespread and abundant. American elder grows best in full sunlight. Once established, elders soon outdistance herbaceous competition. Thickets of elder are replaced by more shade-tolerant species during the later stages of forest succession, but individual plants and small runners will persist under a forest canopy.

American elder is distributed primarily throughout the eastern and Midwestern United States.



Common Elderberry distribution from USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

For updated distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

### Establishment

American elder naturally reproduces from seeds, sprouts, layers, and root suckers. Variable degrees of hard-seediness and embryo dormancy are exhibited. Prior to spring or fall planting, the seed should be scarified with sulfuric acid, also stratification at 36-40 degrees F for two months is required for spring planting. Seedling growth is rather slow during the first year.

Elders can also be propagated from 10" to 18" hardwood cuttings taken from vigorous one-year-old canes, each must include three sets of buds. Cuttings may be taken while dormant, placed in moist peat or sphagnum moss, and held in cold storage at approximately 40 degrees F for spring planting. One-year-old seedlings or rooted cuttings are usually large enough for field planting.

### Management

Mulching around each plant will improve seedling survival. Annual pruning will considerably improve fruit yield. Removal of terminal shoots and dead canes will reduce winter-kill and help control elder borers.

### Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Seedlings or rooted cuttings are available commercially. Horticultural selections or local and regional ecotypes are marketed by nurseries. Vintage Germplasm was released through the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Program in 2010. Vintage Germplasm is a selected class release that was evaluated for characteristics important to conservation uses, including stem production, plant height, fruit production and ability to regrow after cutting.

### Prepared By

USDA NRCS Northeast Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>>, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>