

European Elder

This fact sheet provides basic information about European elder—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. European elder is a tree native to Europe and parts of Asia and Africa, and it also grows in the United States. There are several different types of elder, such as American elder, but European elder is the type most often used as a supplement.

Common Names—European elder, black elder, elder, elderberry, elder flower, sambucus

Latin Name—*Sambucus nigra*

What It Is Used For

- Parts of the elder tree—such as the berries and flowers—have long been used for pain, swelling, infections, coughs, and skin conditions.
- Today, elderberry and elder flower are used for flu, colds, fevers, constipation, and sinus infections.

How It Is Used

The dried flowers (elder flower) and the cooked blue/black berries (elderberry) of the European elder tree are used in teas, liquid extracts, and capsules.

What the Science Says

- Although some small studies show that elderberry may relieve flu symptoms, the evidence is not strong enough to support this use of the berry.
- A few studies have suggested that a product containing elder flower and other herbs can help treat sinus infections when used with antibiotics, but further research is needed to confirm any benefit.
- No reliable information is available on the effectiveness of elderberry and elder flower for other uses.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Uncooked or unripe elderberries are toxic and can cause nausea, vomiting, or severe diarrhea. Only the blue/black berries of elder are edible.
- Because of elder flower's possible diuretic effects, use caution if taking it with drugs that increase urination.
- Tell your health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This helps to ensure coordinated and safe care.

Sources

Elderberry. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on May 15, 2007.

Elderflower. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturaldatabase.com> on May 15, 2007.

Elder (*Sambucus nigra* L.) Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at <http://www.naturalstandard.com> on May 16, 2007.

Elder flower. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:103-105.

For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view:

- *What's in the Bottle? An Introduction to Dietary Supplements* at nccam.nih.gov/health/bottle/
- *Herbal Supplements: Consider Safety, Too* at nccam.nih.gov/health/supplement-safety/

NCCAM Clearinghouse

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

E-mail: info@nccam.nih.gov

CAM on PubMed

Web site: nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

European Elder listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-elder.html

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