



Plants for Birds: Common Elderberry (American Elderberry, Black Elderberry)

Common elderberry is a wonderful Montana native plant guaranteed to attract birds to your yard. This large deciduous shrub produces showy clusters

of white blossoms in the spring and juicy, dark purplish-black berries in late summer, giving color and texture to the garden. This plant has a long history of culinary, nutritional, and medicinal uses for humans but also has very important uses for wildlife. The thick branches provide cover and nesting sites for birds while the showy flowers provide nectar for bees, butterflies, and even hummingbirds. The prolific berries are enjoyed by wildlife of all types, from chipmunks to Black Bears and a wide variety of birds including thrushes, Warbling Vireos, Western Tanagers, towhees, woodpeckers, grosbeaks, and many more!

This versatile native can be found in forests, woodlands, thickets, riparian sites, ravines and roadsides in valleys to subalpine sites.

Native Americans have been using this elderberry plant for thousands of years. Today berries are used in pies, wines,

- **Scientific Name:** *Sambucus canadensis* (Caprifoliaceae family)
- **Height:** 6 to 12 ft.
- **Hardiness:** Zone 3
- **Wildlife Value:** Important for cover and nesting sites. Berries provide food for wildlife and blossoms attract pollinators.

cobblers, jelly, candy, sauces and syrups. The flowers are used in flavorful teas, cordials, floral waters, tonics, fritters and ointments. The berries are known to have many health benefits being high in anti-

oxidants and aiding the immune system. The *Wall Street Journal* mentioned them in an article with seven other berries as being our “nutritional royalty.”

Sambucus canadensis is an upright, fast growing, spreading shrub that grows from 6 to 12 feet high. Due to its size and sprawling nature, it is best used in backyard hedges, mixed shrub borders, and screens rather than in a home foundation planting. It does best in moist, well-drained sites in sun or partial shade. It’s a hardy, cold-tolerant plant that can live up to 60 years and, once established, can produce massive amounts of fruit. Another species, the Red Elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*) is also native to Montana but is less commonly planted and the red berries can be toxic unless cooked.

Plant this native where it has room to grow and watch the birds flock in to feast on the berries.

~ Leslie Eddington

Above: Common Elderberry flowers and fruit.

