



Diann's Herb Newsletter

WINTER 2013

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The International Herb Association selects the Herb of the Year. Here is a list of the ones starting from the beginning of the 21st century:

2013 Elder
2012 Rose
2011 Horseradish
2010 Dill
2009 Bay Laurel
2008 Calendula
2007 Lemon Balm
2006 Pelargonium
2005 Oregano
2004 Garlic
2003 Basil
2002 Echinacea
2001 Sage
2000 Rosemary

If you invite an elderberry tree in the yard, you will invite the elves, the nature spirits, and the faeries into your life.
--Ellen Dugan

2013 HERB OF THE YEAR: ELDERBERRY

"Elder has been revered since antiquity as a virtual medicine chest, prominent in folklore, its virtues used in numerous ways: to protect and heal, create tasty beverages and foods, and even entertain." (*Elder: Herb of the Year 2013*)

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*), also called elderflower, is a tree that bears cream-colored flowers followed by dark purple berries in autumn. Elderberry has been traditionally used to relieve pain, inflammation, water retention, and congestion. All parts of the elderberry tree, including the bark, flowers, and leaves, have been used in herbal medicine. Elderberry leaves are added to topical creams and sitz baths to treat inflammatory disorders, such as arthritis, boils, and exzema.



Elderberry is one of the most effective herbs for preventing and treating upper respiratory infections. Laboratory studies have shown that elderberry reduces excessive sinus mucus secretion, and some studies also suggest that elderberry can help lessen swelling of mucous membranes, improve sinus drainage, and decreased nasal congestion in those with bacterial sinusitis. In a clinical trial in Israel elderberry has been shown to be very effective against at least eight strains of flu virus.

Fresh elderflowers can also be used to make a topical cream for relief of arthritis—simmer a few handfuls of fresh elderflowers in melted petroleum jelly for 40 minutes, and allow this mixture to cool and solidify before applying it to the hands at bedtime.

In some cultures, the elder tree was believed to ward off evil influence and give protection from witches. But it was also believed that witches gathered under elder trees during the fruiting season. If an elder tree was cut down, a spirit known as the Elder Mother would be released and take her revenge. The tree could safely be cut only while chanting a rhyme to the Elder Mother. **The most powerful wand in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a wand made of *sumbucus* known as the "Elder Wand."** In some regions, superstition, religious belief, or tradition prohibited

When the days
have grown in
length,
When the sun has
greater power,
Shining in his
noonday strength,
When the Elder
tree's in flower,
When each shady
kind of place,
By the stream and
up the lane,
Shows its mass of
creamy lace--
Summer's really
come again.
-Cicely M. Barker,
Fairies of the Trees

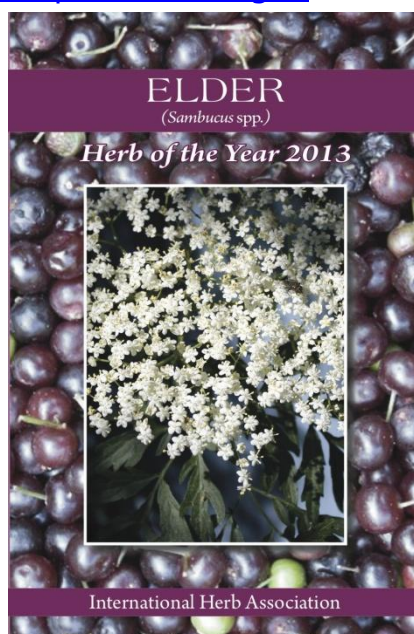
the cutting of certain trees for bonfires, most notably in Witchcraft customs the Elderberry tree; "Elder be ye Lady's tree, burn it not or cursed ye'll be"—a rhyme from an oral tradition.

Because of the soft pith in an elder branch, whistles were often made from the stems. Since the plant is mildly poisonous, I would hesitate to actually blow on an elder whistle.

Although there are a few precautions when using elderberry as a food source for humans, elder flowers and elderberries are nutritious sources for making teas, wine, jams, jellies, pies, yogurt, fritters, and more. The elder leaves and stems, however, are poisonous to humans, and the berries should not be eaten raw. In spite of that, they are good sources of essential amino acids and proteins as well as vitamin C—in other words, they are good for us. They also contain phosphorus, potassium, and vitamin A.

Elderberries grow in wild places and are definitely worth the trouble of finding them. They can be found with lovely blooms in low-lying warm areas starting in the spring, then with ripe berries starting in mid-July, and the season lasts until September. On the other hand, you may cultivate a few bushes of your own. They are attractive in bloom or with berries, and they are very easy to grow. Since birds love elderberries, you may have to compete for this delicacy. **Elderberry plants will be available in the spring at Diann's Greenhouse.**

The US Department of Agriculture website provides more information on elderberry as well as many other plants. Go to www.plants.usda.gov.



It's time to "Respect your Elder" in this collection featuring one of the herb world's most useful plants. Elder has been revered since antiquity as a virtual medicine chest, prominent in folklore, its virtues used in numerous ways: to protect and heal, create tasty beverages and foods, and even entertain. Elder: Herb of the Year™ 2013 is brimming with facts on every facet of this plant including fragrance and flavor, botany and cultivation, lore and history, fun facts, poetry, crafts, medicinal information, and more. Sprinkled throughout the book are photographs and illustrations and there are recipes for the kitchen, bath and boudoir, and apothecary! This compilation contains 25 articles from 20 contributors--experts, members, and friends of the IHA, as well as photographs and illustrations from a dozen artists, all inspired by Elder: Herb of the Year™ 2013. Available at Diann's Greenhouse for \$14.95 including tax.

I'm still working on the herb workshops I will offer this year. Let me know if you would like to have a hypertufa workshop prior to the container gardening workshop in March. It would be an opportunity to make your own rustic container.

When you settle a share of land, first plant an Elder tree, then make your home there.

--T. Elder Sachs

Recipes

Elderberry Chocolate-Mint Tea

Yield: about 2 cups

2 cups water
2 tea bags (black or green) or 2 tablespoons loose tea
2 tablespoons dried elderberries
2 tablespoons fresh chocolate mint

In a medium saucepan bring all ingredients to a boil. Remove from heat and steep for 3 to 5 minutes. The longer you steep the tea, the stronger it will be.

Strain through a fine-mesh strainer or a coffee filter. Immediately serve warm in mugs or teacups.

Elderberry Jelly

Yield: 5 to 6 cups

3 pounds elderberries (fresh)
Pure water
½ cup lemon juice
7 cups sugar
¼ teaspoon butter
2 pouches liquid pectin*
**Elderberry jelly requires the liquid pectin only, and powder is NOT a substitute.*

Put the berries into a non-aluminum pot with ½ cup water. Bring mixture to a boil and then lower the heat and simmer for about 20 minutes. Mash the berries to extract the maximum juice.

Strain the berries through a fine sieve (or cheesecloth). Measure the juice. This recipe requires 3 cups of juice. Add water (no more than ½ cup) if needed to bring the liquid up to 3 cups. Add the lemon juice. Stir.

Add the sugar and bring the mixture to a full boil for one minute, stirring constantly. Add the butter and stir. (Adding butter helps to prevent foam from forming.)

Remove the pot from the heat and immediately stir in the liquid pectin.

Pour the hot mixture into hot, sterilized jars. Top with hot metal flats and bands, and tighten gently. Process in a water bath for 10-12 minutes. Remove from hot water and tighten bands. Cool and check to see that lids have sealed. Store and enjoy.

Flu First Aid

2 ounces yarrow leaves and flowers (or hyssop, peppermint, or sage)
2 ounces elderflowers
2 pints boiling water
Honey

Place the yarrow and elderflowers in a ceramic teapot and add the boiling water. Infuse the mixture for 20 minutes, then strain and sweeten with honey to taste. Use ½ cup every two hours.

Recipes are from Elder: Herb of the Year 2013

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