PLANT FACT SHEET

Sambucus nigra Linn.

GENUS *Sambucus* **FAMILY** Viburnaceae

COMMON NAMES European Elderberry, Black Elder

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Flowers - tea, Herb, Seeds - oil

The ripe fruit are used for jams and drinks. They are also used for wine. They are high in Vitamin C.
The flowers can be eaten cooked. They are added to salads and made into fritters fried with eggs. The flowers have a slightly bitter taste and are used in elder flower cordial. The flowers and leaves are boiled for herbal tea.
The seeds are pressed for oil.
CAUTION The roots, leaves and stems are reported to be poisonous. The fruit are considered poisonous when green but edible when black.

DESCRIPTION

A small tree or bush. It loses its leaves during the year. It grows up to 6-10 m high. The bark is light grey. It has brown warty lenticels. It has stout shoots. The leaves have 5-7 leaflets and the edges toothed. The leaves are 25 cm long. The flowers are musk-scented and in flattened heads. These are 20 cm across. It has a small black fruit. These are round and glossy. They are 8 mm across. They hang down in bunches. There are 3 oval brown seeds.

HABITAT

It is a temperate plant. It only fruits consistently between 400 m and 1800 m altitude in the tropics. The plant grows up to 2600 m altitude. It can grow in the European Alps up to 1500 m altitude. It is damaged by drought but can tolerate frost. It needs a protected shady position. It grows naturally in temperate regions in the northern hemisphere. It favours soils with a high nitrogen content. In Argentina it grows from sea level to 1,000 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 5-10. Arboretum Tasmania.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Trees can be grown by dividing the rootstock, or by cuttings. They can also be grown from seed.

Harvesting and Seed Production

It bears fruit all year round. The fruit are usually dried to remove the bitter taste before using. The flowering season is short in colder areas in Europe but is extended in warmer climates. The flowers can be picked and left in heaps to warm for a few hours before the petals separate. These are then sifted and dried.

NOTES

There are about 25 Sambucus species. Also put in the family Sambucaceae.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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