



Willow Moon Herbals

Elder, Elderberry

Latin binomial: *Sambucus nigra*

Description: Elder is a shrub to small tree with masses of creamy-yellow, umbrella-shaped, flowering parts and dark purple edible berries. Elder is considered a magical and holy tree by various cultures of western and northern Europe. She is truly ancient, and vestiges of her existence have been found at Stone Age sites. Celtic lore regards elder as the tree of regeneration, representing “death in life and life in death.” She is considered the tree of transformation, guardian of the thirteenth month of the Celtic tree calendar, which contains the end of the year, Samhain (Halloween) and the beginning of the New Year (All Soul’s Day). There is so very much more to be said of Elder than space permits, and it would behoove anyone interested to learn more about her magical and healing properties through humble respect and gentle openness to develop a working relationship with her.



Uses: Elder has been termed “the medicine chest of the country people.” Her flowers, berries and leaves are all beneficial, including the music that emanates from pipes fashioned of her branches, and it is said that this music draws out wood elves from the far glades to heal the spirit. Elder’s antiviral properties make it effective for relieving colds, flu and fevers. Her berries have been made into the well-known cough syrup for children, Sambucol. The herb is also an excellent detoxifier and helps clear infections by supporting immune function. Herbalists have also recommended elder for hay fever and sinusitis. Extracts made from the ripe blue-black fruit of the elderberry can be a superb remedy for chronic rheumatism, neuralgia and sciatica. Elder flowers soaked in water and applied to the face can lighten freckles and cool sunburned skin; additionally cold elder blossom tea rejuvenates eyes strained by computer work, squinting in the sun and heavy reading. Bruised leaves were commonly used as an insect repellent. A salve made from her fresh flowers heals skin wounds, burns and chapped hands. The berries are rich in iron and can be mashed and mixed with honey for a quick, energy-enhancing spread.

Dosage: For colds and fever, take 2 to 3 cups of the infusion, 2-3 times daily to introduce sweating. Follow manufacturer’s recommendations for berry syrups.



Sources: Herbal Rituals (J. Berger), Herbal Remedies for Dummies (C. Hobbs), The Green Pharmacy (J. Duke)

Note: Any remedies listed on this web site are from historical references and used for teaching purposes only. The contents are not meant to diagnose, treat, prescribe, or substitute consultation with a licensed health-care professional.

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