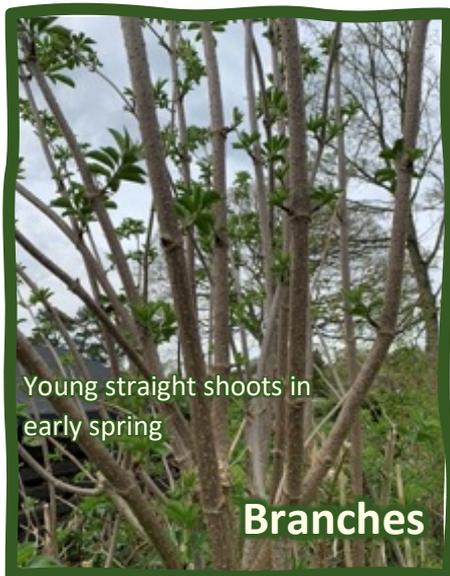


PLANT ID: elder

Sambucus nigra L.



Spring - early summer

Elder leaves are very distinctive, and the plant's diesel-like smell is unmistakable – some people find it pleasant – what do you think?

The bark of the bigger branches is deeply furrowed and corky, while the new **shoots** tend to be very straight, upright with dimpled **striation** markings (**lenticels**) along its length.

Hundreds of clusters or **umbels** of tiny green buds appear in early spring, turning into aromatic flowers.



Botany glossary (part 1)

Berry: A fleshy fruit, normally with many seeds inside

Compound leaf: a leaf that consists of more than one leaflet

Dicot.: (dichotyledon) Plants with branching veins, resembling a net

Leaflet: a single small leaf that form part of a grouping of other leaflets

Lenticels: A raised marking that is a breathable pore

Shoots: new stem or leaf growth

Striation: A fine ridge, line, groove or streaks of colour



PLANT ID: elder *Sambucus nigra*

Late summer - early autumn

The prolific clusters of white flowers become small, shiny black berries. Each berry is approximately 3-5mm in diameter and each cluster can contain up to 100 berries.

Late autumn - winter

Early autumn leaf buds always look crimson red and tattered with emerging leaves. Elder is deciduous so loses that year's leaves in late autumn. Green algae sometimes shows up on the bark in winter.



Ripe
berries

Uncooked
elderberries
are toxic !



Elder shrub



Leaf arrangement



dimple-like
striations

Young,
straight
shoot



Pith



Wood-ear
fungus
(*Auricularia
auricula-judae*)

Associated parasites

The Wood Ear fungus grows on older branches and can be seen all year round either dried and shrivelled in dry weather or full-blown jellied after rainfall.

If you cut into a young shoot - you will see at its centre a soft spongy **pith** which can be gouged out easily using a tent peg or bamboo kebab stick.

PLANT ID: elder

Sambucus nigra L.

Fact File:

CURRENT STATUS: Common

LOCATION: Found almost everywhere across Europe

Plant Description (aka Taxonomy)

Member of the Moschatel family (*Adoxaceae*). A **dicot**. A **deciduous** woody, flowering shrub or small tree growing up to 10m tall.



Flowers from May to July

Flower Structure: Creamy white flat-topped **umbel** (10-20cm across) resembling an open umbrella.



Fruits from August – September.

Known as a **Berry** – hence its name. Green at first turning crimson then black when ripe.



Leaf

Pinnate toothed leaves in opposite pairs.



Habitat

Found in Woodlands, hedgerows and scrubby waste ground. Likes fertile soils and will quickly colonise disturbed ground. Often alongside Nettles which also like nutrient rich ground. Elder plays host to the parasitic Wood-ear fungus (*Auricularia auricula-judae*)



Edible The flowers and berries are edible when cooked, but the leaves and twigs contain toxic levels of cyanogenic glycosides.

The leaves and twigs are safe to handle and play with, but as with all plants you must always wash your hands afterwards and before eating.



Magic Status A highly magical powerful plant. If burned you will see the Devil or if grown by your house will keep the Devil away and ward off evil.

ALIASES

Also known as the Boortree, Boontree, Borewood, Battery, Dog tree, Ellern and the Fairy tree

What to look for



Best time to see it and use it

This depends on what you want to do with it!

- In spring, collect the plentiful elder flowers to make elderflower cordial, tea or fritters – but beware – uncooked flowers are berries are poisonous!
- In spring, when the rising sap makes removing its bark easy, make elder whistles (sometimes known as May Whistles), pea shooters and pencils.
- Collect the berries in autumn, to make plant dyes, berry cordial and... wine!
- Use older autumn stems to whittle your own Elder Wand.

Stem and trunk

Look out for the deeply furrowed and corky textured older bark and young straight shoots with dimpled striation markings.

The Judas-ear fungus can be seen all year round either dried and shrivelled in dry weather or full-blown 'jellied' after rainfall.

FOOD WEB

Nectar gathered by bees

Berries eaten by birds

Moths lay their eggs and their larvae eat the leaves

IMPERSONATORS:

Similar plants confused with it include: Wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*) and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) which both have white or cream flowers in an **umbel** like shape. Like the rowan it has fewer **opposite** paired pinnate toothed leaves and they are not as neatly cut and presented on their leaf stems. When not in flower the leaves, the deeply furrowed bark and the 'petrol' smell are key to identification.



PLANT ID: elder *Sambucus nigra*

Botany glossary (part 2)

Opposite (leaves) Leaves that are opposite on the stem

Pinnate A compound leaf with more than 3 leaflets arranged in opposite pairs

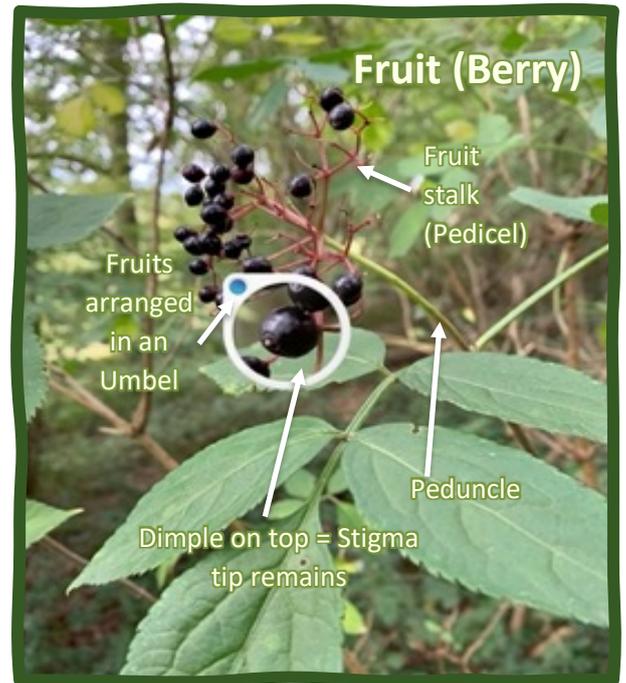
Pith Soft spongy material in the centre of young plant stems

Taxonomy The scientific practice of identifying, describing, naming and classifying Earth's organisms

Umbels A group of flower stalks radiating out like the spokes of an umbrella

Vein The part of the leaf that transports nutrients

Petiole A stalk of a leaf



Get up close to the elder by taking a virtual tour using the Pappus film library.



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Biggest and oldest

Elders is not usually known for reaching any great size or age. However, in Haute-savoie, France, there is an elder tree with a girth of 2m; a remarkable size for this tree - the lifestyle in France must be very good! Typical maximum height is 15m.

More elder ideas

Several of the Pappus Learning Springboards and the Elder Playful Springboards sheets include activities related to elders – check them out at www.pappusproject.eu

Fertile Soils - a soil that contains all the major nutrients for plant growth (e.g. Nitrogen, Phosphorous, Potassium).

Elder is often found near rabbit warrens and badger setts, where the seeds are distributed via the badger's droppings.



Global species risk of extinction (IUCN – Red Data List)

