



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: American Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis* L.)

Plant Family: Adoxaceae (Moschatel)



The flat-topped shape of the flower head is very distinctive photo by Dave Hanson

American Elderberry is a shrub that is both beautiful and functional. Its showy white flowers develop into black berries that are used by a wide variety of birds and mammals. Carpenter and mason bees also use its stems for nesting and it provides pollen for a wide variety native bees, flies and beetles. Its ability to form dense stands in riparian areas makes it well suited to buffer planting and other soil stabilization projects.

Statewide Wetland Indicator Status:

- FACW

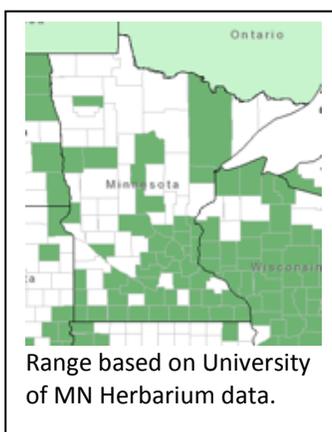


The leaves are long and lace-like in shape Photo by Dave Hanson

Identification

This thicket-forming shrub can be identified by its unique flowers and berries. The stems are tall, erect, and arching. The newest branches are green in color and glabrous. Older branches are grayish-brown, and have warty-like lenticels. With age the branches become rougher. The leaves are pinnately compound and deciduous with elliptical or lance-like leaflets. Leaflet surfaces are dark green, slightly hairy, and have finely serrated margins. Bases of the leaves are rounded, while the tips abruptly come to a point. The stalks of the leaflets are green with a hairy channel running up the stalk. Numerous flat-topped flower heads appear and bloom from late June to early August. Flowers are white and have a very distinctive odor. The fruit, which is a round berry, ripens from July to August. Although the purple-black fruit is edible, it is slightly bitter.

Range



The American Elderberry is most common in Southern Minnesota, though it does occur in northern parts of the state. Outside of Minnesota it can be found throughout the Eastern and Midwestern United States. It prefers full sun and it has shallow roots that allow it to colonize in water logged and oxygen-poor soils. It is most commonly found in shrub wetlands, lowland forests, streambanks, field edges, and lakeshores.



The berries are purple-black color and are edible, but bitter Photo by Dave Hanson

Uses

This easily established shrub works well for soil stabilization in swales, floodplains, and along stream banks. The flowers are very decorative and, because of its late blooming period, can add an interesting dimension to gardens and native plantings. A wide variety of birds including waxwings, cardinals, sparrows, robins, pheasants and grouse eat the berries and carry the seeds far and wide. Quail and pheasants also use this species for winter cover. White-tailed deer browse the foliage and eat ripe berries. Carpenter bees and mason bees also use the stems of elderberry as nesting sites during the winter. Many people enjoy the berries in pies, wines, and jellies.

Primary Uses:

- Moist soil stabilization
- Habitat
- Aesthetics

Planting Recommendations

Planting can be accomplished with seed, cuttings, or containerized plants. It spreads easily by the prolific amount of seed it produces. Seeds require cold temperatures to break dormancy. Scarification may also be necessary because the seed is commonly spread after being digested by animals. Cuttings can be taken from the plant during dormancy and planted directly into the soil in the spring.

Planting Methods

- Seed
- Containerized Plants
- Cuttings



The species can compete well with other vegetation Photo by Dave Hanson

Similar Species



Sambucus racemosa (Red-berried Elder) is very similar to *Sambucus canadensis*. *S. racemosa* has flowers that are pyramidal and bloom early in the summer. The berries are red, unlike the black berries of *S. canadensis*. The pith of *S. racemosa* is brown, whereas the pith of *S. canadensis* is white (Photos by Dave Hanson)

References

Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota by Welby R. Smith

USDA Plants Database: http://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_sanica4.pdf

http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_sanica4.pdf