

# European Elder Berry

*Sambucus nigra* L.

[Fam. *Caprifoliaceae*]

## OVERVIEW

European elder is a plant native to Europe, Northern Africa, and Western- and Central Asia. Its flowers and berries have a long history of use in traditional European medicine. Elder berries have also been used for making preserves, wines, winter cordials, and for adding flavor and color to other wines. Dietary supplements containing extracts, juices or syrups of European elder berry have become popular in the U.S. as remedies for treating cold and flu symptoms, sold mainly in natural food stores alongside other popular cold and flu herbal remedies.

## USES

Treatment of cold and flu symptoms including aches and pains, coughing, nasal congestion, mucous discharge and fever; immune system stimulant.

## DOSAGE

Clinical trials on patients with influenza suggest using the standardized extract for 3 to 5 days starting at the first sign of flu symptoms.

## Crude Preparations

EXPRESSED JUICE: 1 glass (presumably 8 oz., size not specified in original source) 2 times daily.

SYRUP: 1-2 tablespoons mixed with hot water.

TEA DECOCTION: 1 cup (made from 10 g dried berries) several times daily.

## Standardized Preparations

[Editor's Note: To the editors' knowledge, at the time of publication of this Information Sheet (November 2004) Sambucol® products were the only standardized elder berry preparations being marketed as well as the only ones to have been studied. The manufacturer states that it has standardized the elder berry extract used in all Sambucol® preparations to its antiviral activity as measured in an in vitro bioassay, and that this quantified in vitro antiviral activity is consistent on a batch-to-batch basis.]

SAMBUCOL® SYRUP is a proprietary formula containing 38% black elder berry extract (2:1). The chil-

dren's product is a proprietary formula containing 19% black elder berry extract. Per the Sambucol® liquid formulations packages, the dosages are as follows:

For intensive use:

Adults: 2 teaspoons 4 times daily

Children: 1 teaspoon 4 times daily

For daily maintenance:

Adults: 2 teaspoons daily

Children: 1 teaspoon daily

LOZENGES (contains 130 mg standardized dry extract and 100 mg vitamin C):

For intensive use:

Adults: 2 lozenges 3 times daily

Children: 1 lozenge 4 times daily

For daily maintenance:

Adults: 1 lozenge 2 times daily

Children: 1 lozenge daily

## CONTRAINDICATIONS

None known.

PREGNANCY AND LACTATION: There are no known restrictions although there are insufficient data to confirm safety during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

## ADVERSE EFFECTS

No reported side effects. Unripe elder berries or improperly prepared elder berry preparations can cause adverse side effects including diarrhea, nausea and vomiting.

## DRUG INTERACTIONS

No confirmed drug interactions. Potential interactions with diuretics or drugs that interact with diuretics, as well as with laxatives have been speculated. A potential beneficial interaction between elder berry preparations and decongestants and antibiotics has also been speculated based on preliminary clinical observations.

## Comments

When using a dietary supplement, purchase it from a reliable source. For best results, use the same brand of product throughout the period of use. As with all medications and dietary supplements, please inform your healthcare provider of all herbs and medications you are taking. Interactions may occur between medications and herbs or even among different herbs when taken at the same time. Treat your herbal supplement with care by taking it as directed, storing it as advised on the label, and keeping it out of the reach of children and pets. Consult your healthcare provider with any questions.



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