

Forest Farming Quick Guide

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)

Elderberry is a deciduous woody shrub-like plant native to much of North America. Elderberry benefits both wildlife and humans, providing habitat and sustenance for songbirds and pollinators, and berries and flowers for the medicinal and culinary industry. Various cultures throughout the world have utilized elderberry species as medicine. Elderberry shrubs can grow rapidly, from cuttings to berry production in just 3 years under ideal conditions.

Site Selection:

- Prefers moist, well-drained soil, but can tolerate conditions such as occasional drought and flooding.
- Slightly acidic soil, with a pH range of 5.5- 6.5
- Hardy in USDA zones 3-9
- Grows in full-sun and partial shade conditions. For best fruit production, plant in full sun.

Site Preparation and Maintenance:

- Remove large sticks and debris that will interfere with planting and selectively remove competitive vegetation to prepare a clear planting area.
- Once established, weed or mow around plants as needed.
- Elderberries respond well to mulching with composted manure.
- After the second year, prune annually in early spring to remove dead, damaged or weak canes, and canes that are 3+ years old. Pruning can result in increased fruit production.
- Monitor for disease and pests.

Planting:

- Elderberry can be started from cuttings around 10 - 12" long with at least 3 nodes.
- Cuttings can be taken while branches are dormant. Keep track of which end of the cuttings go up. Place cuttings in the fridge until planting time; don't allow them to dry out. Plant in the spring after the ground has thawed with at least 2 nodes below ground.
- Space plantings at least 4 feet apart.
- Surround with a 2–3-inch layer of leaf litter, compost, or wood chips.
- Newly planted cuttings require weekly waterings in the first year for successful establishment.

Harvesting:

- Harvest blooming flowers in early summer and berries in late summer when dark purple.
- Collect berries or flowers by removing them completely from the stem, ensure there are no remaining stems mixed in with berries.
- Berries often ripen unevenly and tend to 'shatter' off the peduncle; Netting can help protect loss from 'shattering' and birds.
- Raw berries may cause nausea if consumed. Cooking or dehydrating the berries first is recommended before consumption.



