

Elderberries for Winter Health – With Elderberry Syrup Recipe

With wintertime comes cold and flu season and a general strain on the immune system. Our bodies work harder to regulate temperature in the cold, our immune systems are taxed, and we spend more time indoors in close quarters, exposing ourselves to a variety of illnesses. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to lend your immune system a helping hand, and one of my favorites is the elderberry.

The berries and flowers of black elderberry not only have immune boosting properties, they are highly nutritious and make an excellent cold and flu remedy. This is a good plant to become familiar with for your winter health, whether it's found in the wild or the vitamin aisle of your grocery store. It will quickly become one of your go-to natural remedies. They are aptly named Elder, with an extensive record of their use in cultures throughout history. Evidence of use has been found in Stone Age archeological sites. *Sambucus nigra*, the plant's scientific name, appears in the writing of the ancient Greeks.

Elderberry as Medicine

Elderberry can be taken as a natural medicine in many forms, including tinctures, syrups, extracts, and lozenges. The berries can be used as a dietary supplement in the form of jam, syrup, and a variety of beverages. It is important to note that unless fully cooked, the berries contain compounds that can be toxic, so never eat them raw.

Elderberries are very nutritious, with high levels of phosphorous, potassium, antioxidants, and vitamin C. They

contain anti-viral and anti-inflammatory properties and offer overall support for the immune system.

Taking elderberry daily is an excellent preventative measure during cold and flu season, and taking elderberry as a treatment will shorten the duration of the flu and relieve the swelling of nasal passages accompanying a head cold.

The diaphoretic properties of elderberry induce sweating and assist in breaking fevers. Hot spiced elderberry wine was a common winter beverage in London, which is not surprising as hot elderberry broths are a traditional preparation for winter wellness. Topically, elderberry can be used as a poultice to reduce inflammation. This plant is truly a natural medicine chest.

Wildcrafting Elderberry

If you live in an area where black elderberry grows wild, you can gather the berries when they are ripe in the fall. It works best to take garden pruners and clip off the sprays of berries at the base into a bucket or basket. Pulling the berries off the stems takes some effort, but if you get a few people working together it turns the work into fun. I have actually had friends bring their elderberry harvest to a party, and by the end of the evening, everyone was joining in to help them. Once off the stems, you can freeze the berries in quart freezer bags to use throughout the year.

I like to simmer elderberries down into a syrup to take by the spoonful as a cold season supplement or to pour on pancakes. You can also preserve elderberry syrup, jam, or jelly in glass jars using basic canning instructions. I am a big fan of the Pomona's Pectin recipes because they allow for alternative sweeteners in varying amounts. Additionally, elderberries make a delicious wine, and can be brewed in a tea with ginger for making a winter kombucha.

Growing Elderberry

Elderberries are fairly easy to grow in your backyard from seeds or starts, and they make an attractive landscape plant that is beneficial for wildlife. (Don't worry, there will be plenty of berries to share!) You can plant whole berries in pots after harvesting in the fall, and with consistent watering, they will sprout into starts that can be planted early in the spring. They also propagate well from cuttings.

Native plant nurseries have them available as potted starts in many areas, and they should be able to give information about successful planting tips for your USDA zone.

Elderberries generally like well-drained soil and plenty of water in the first couple of years to get established. They can be planted as a hedge or single shrub, and under the right conditions, they can grow into small trees. Another benefit of growing elderberry in your yard is that bees and pollinators love the flowers. You really can't go wrong with native plants.

A Simple Elderberry Syrup Recipe

Of the many forms to incorporate elderberries in my winter health regimen, syrup is by far my favorite. There is just something comforting about rich, purple elderberry syrup on a cold day or when you are feeling under the weather.

You can purchase these syrups already made as dietary supplements, or you can make your own. If you don't have access to fresh elderberries, many bulk herb companies sell them dried.

Local honey lends a little sweetness to the tart flavor with the added benefit of antibacterial properties for your immune system. This tried-and-true recipe is very simple and stores well with refrigeration.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup black elderberries
- 2 cups water
- up to 1 cup raw honey

Put fresh, frozen, or dried black elderberries in a saucepan with water and bring to a boil. If you are using dried, you may want to slightly increase water. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for about 40 minutes. Strain berry pulp through a sieve or cheesecloth and discard. Stir honey into the remaining liquid, once cooled to around 100°F.

You can keep the syrup in the refrigerator up to 3 months, or can it in small jars following instructions in a canning guide. Take as a daily immune boosting supplement or enjoy on pancakes as a delicious and healthy treat!

Recommended Products:

- Elderberry Syrup
- Mother Earth Organic Root Cider – Barrier Island Organics
- Shillington's Echinacea Plus
- Shillington's Blood Detox Formula

Further Reading:

- Make Your Immune System Bulletproof with These Natural Remedies
- *Elderberries and Recipes*
- Herbs That Can Help Get Us Through Winter
- Five Common Weeds to Cultivate for Health and Nutrition

Sources:

- *Elderberry as Alternative Medicine* – University of Maryland Medical Center
- *Medicinal Qualities of Elderberry* – Herbal Legacy
- *History of Elderberry* – Herbal Legacy

- *Elderberry Syrup Recipes* – Mountain Rose Blog
- *Gathering Wild Elderberry* – Mountain Hearth
- *Cultivating Elderberry* – Cornell University