



Beginner's Guide to Using Elderberries & Elderflowers Safely & Effectively



Interest in elderberry has skyrocketed in recent years, and for good reason.

This easy-to-find, tasty berry has some potent medicinal properties that have made it the focus of [hundreds of scientific studies](#). Its high concentrations of anthocyanins—the dark pigments also found in blueberries that have made it a popular “superfood”—are believed to help [reduce inflammation and oxidative stress](#), which have been linked to numerous chronic diseases. Researchers are investigating how consuming elderberries may help prevent [cardiovascular disease](#), [metabolic disorders](#), and [cut the risk of cancer](#).

Much of the attention elderberry has received of late stems from its antiviral properties. [Studies in humans](#) have found that supplementation with elderberry significantly shortens the duration and severity of colds and flu, and [lab studies](#) suggest that elderberry not only stimulates the immune system, it interferes with viruses’s ability to penetrate cells and inhibits viral replication. A triple punch against invaders!

[Elderflowers also have medicinal uses](#), and likewise taste amazing in a wide variety of recipes. [Here’s more on the benefits of elderflower](#).

This brief guide is meant to give you a quick overview of what you need to know about using elderberries and elderflowers safely and effectively. If you want to know more about the science behind elderberry, its rich history of medicinal use, foraging information, growing advice from elderberry experts around the world, plus more than 60 recipes for using elderberry and elderflower, I hope you’ll check out my new book, [Everything Elderberry](#).

Disclaimer

This guide is meant for informational purposes only and does not constitute personalized medical advice. Please consult a physician before using any herb for the first time.

SOURCING ELDERBERRIES & ELDERFLOWERS

First, let's go over where to get elderberries and elderflowers, as you have numerous options.



Option 1: Foraging

Elderberries grow wild all over the world, so if you wish to forage them, your medicinal berries and flowers can be had for free. Just be absolutely sure to positively identify elderberry before harvesting, as there are plants that resemble elderberry that you shouldn't eat. Many people assume when

they see little white flowers or purple berries, they've found an elderberry, and they're often dangerously wrong. [Here's what to know about elderberry identification.](#)



Option 2: Grow Your Own

Even if you have elderberries to forage near you, there are compelling reasons to grow your own elderberries. Foremost among them, you can keep an eye on your berries and harvest at just the right time, which is far harder when your plants are miles away. I've often found not-quite-ripe berries and mostly empty clusters in my favorite foraging grounds.

If your plants are right near your house, you can defend part of your crop from birds, who will take every ripe berry if you let them! Plus, the copious elderflowers in early summer attract pollinators and are a beautiful addition

to the garden. Best of all, you can choose cultivars selected for flavor, which may be far superior to what you can forage locally.

Option 3: Buy Berries and Flowers

If you can't or don't want to grow or forage elderberries and elderflowers, they're readily available online in many forms. There are instances when fresh flowers or berries are preferred, and if you're lucky, you'll find a grower nearby who can supply them. Search under 'elderberry' and your zip code at localharvest.org.

If you're ordering dried berries or flowers: Buy organic if you can, and know that at certain times of year, they can be very hard to come by or very expensive because they're in short supply. [Mountain Rose Herbs](#) is one of the most respected sources for herbal products around, and their prices are competitive.

If you choose to buy pre-made syrup or gummies: Check the ingredient list and avoid chemical additives. If you can find syrup made from fresh rather than dried berries, it will likely be more medicinally powerful.

You can probably find mass-market elderberry syrup and possibly gummies in your local pharmacy or even supermarket. Natural food stores may also carry tinctures, extracts, and locally-made syrups.

You'll find a dizzying array of options for purchase online. Some sites that sell vitamins and supplements may carry the larger brands of dried berries and flowers, as well as syrups, often for less than you can find them on Amazon, which also sells dried berries, flowers, tinctures, and gummies, and

other products. Mountain Rose Herbs carries high quality elderberries, flowers, and extracts at reasonable prices. There are many options on [Etsy](#) to get small-batch elderberry syrup as well as dried elderberries and [elderflowers](#).

If you buy dried berries or flowers, be on the lookout for bits of stem and leaf, which aren't recommended for consumption. I've found significant amounts of both in the dried berries and flowers I've bought, and they can be a huge pain to pull out. If you're seeing a lot of stem material, let the seller know and plan to buy from somewhere else in the future.



ELDERBERRY SAFETY

With all herbs, we have to remember that medicinally powerful plants need to be understood and respected. **Just because a little may be good for you doesn't mean that eating huge quantities is advisable or safe.**

Here are some safety considerations to bear in mind:

- **We eat only the berries and flowers**, as other parts of the plant can make you violently ill. Remove as much stem material and under-ripe berries as possible.
- **Elder is a food, to be taken in food-like quantities, as opposed to megadoses.**
- **Be cautious with any herb you're using for the first time.** Herbalists suggest starting with a quarter the recommended dose to be sure you don't have an adverse reaction. So if your bottle of elderberry syrup says 1 teaspoon, start with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon.
- **A small number of people are allergic to elderberry**, and some people are more sensitive than others to their compounds.

Contraindications and Interactions

- Because elder stimulates the immune system, it's not recommended for those with auto-immune diseases or taking immunosuppressants.
- Elder is a diuretic and can affect blood glucose, so anyone taking diuretics or diabetes medication should speak with their doctor before consuming.
- It's not recommended to take elderberry with respiratory medications or corticosteroids or if undergoing chemotherapy.
- Herbs may increase or decrease the absorption of some medications, or increase or decrease their actions.
- There are no studies demonstrating the safety of elderberry for pregnant women or young children.

USING ELDERFLOWERS AND ELDERBERRIES

You can use these delicious ingredients medicinally, or just incorporate them into food because their flavor is so wonderful.

If you'd like to try using elderberry and elderflower medicinally, you have a number of options. With either fresh or dry berries and flowers, you can extract the medicinal compounds from elderflowers and elderberries in a variety of ways, using different solvents and methods. Below is a brief list.

Elderflower tea: Flowers steeped in boiling water

Elderberry decoction or syrup: Berries simmered in water

Tincture: Berries or flowers steeped in alcohol, such as vodka or brandy

Glycerite: Berries or flowers steeped in glycerine

Infused Vinegar: Berries or flowers steeped in vinegar

Oxymel: Berries combined with vinegar and honey

Liqueur: Berries or flowers steeped in alcohol, with sugar added

Wine: Fermented berries or flowers

Teas and decoctions can be ready in 10-30 minutes, while the other preparations take weeks to slowly release the compounds into your chosen solvent. Here's information on how to make a [tincture](#), [glycerite](#), [herbal vinegar](#), and [oxymel](#).

Once you have your preferred extraction, you can use them medicinally or as flavorful additions to sodas, cocktails, salad dressings, sauces, herbal tea blends, smoothies, popsicles, gummies, ice creams, and much more. The fresh berries and flowers can be made into jam or baked into pancakes,

muffins, pies, or oatmeal. You'll find recipes for all these concoctions and dozens more in [Everything Elderberry](#).

Here's my research-backed recipe for ["ultra" elderberry syrup](#), and an immune-boosting [overnight oats recipe](#) that incorporates it. If you'd like to make something shelf-stable, [here's an elderberry syrup recipe using brandy from Joybilee Farms](#).



A word about dosages if using medicinally:

There's a lot of variability in how concentrated different preparations are and no hard science to say definitively how much is the right amount to take. Herbalists also vary widely in how much they recommend, ranging from just a drop of tincture per day, to a tablespoon of syrup every hour in

acute situations. In general, herbalists recommend taking elderberry often at the first sign of illness, so frequent small doses are considered more effective than larger ones taken less frequently. Making a decoction and diluting it in hot water to be sipped throughout the day is one easy way to get your elderberry without consuming a great deal of sugar or alcohol.

If you buy a prepared syrup, follow the guidelines on the bottle. If you're preparing your own syrup, most recipes call for 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon several times per day. Don't overdo it, and remember to consider the precautions mentioned above.

Remember if giving elderberry to a child that the dose should be proportionately smaller.

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Find out more about easy natural remedies, garden hacks, and practical shortcuts to greener living at HealthyGreenSavvy.com and on [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#).

