

# FORAGE & FEAST: ELDERFLOWER

OUR RECIPE GUIDES SHOW YOU HOW TO CREATE FANTASTIC FORAGED FEASTS OUT OF NATURALLY-FOUND INGREDIENTS.

## ELDER (SAMBUCUS NIGRA)

**The humble elder is a plant that many of us walk past and pay no attention to. However it is one of the most generous plants in our hedgerows, producing wonderfully scented blooms from late May onwards and superb berries in the autumn.**

**Habitat:** Elder is commonly found in hedgerows, woodlands, parks and in gardens too. You can easily spot elder in summer from some distance as the flowers stand out. It is common across Greater Manchester and it should not be a problem to find this close to your home.

**Description:** Elder is a small tree with 'corky' looking bark which feels light and is common throughout the UK. The leaves, which when crushed have a 'bad' smell, are pinnate (like a ladder) in sets of 5-7 leaflets with slightly toothed edges. The flowers are large, white and often tinged creamy yellow with pollen. These flowers if left to develop will turn into clusters of dark purple, almost black-looking berries in the autumn.

**Look-a-likes:** Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) looks similar, but the smaller leaves of rowan do not smell and the flowers do have the sweet elderflower scent. Rowan berries are also red or orange. Common whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) has more rounded



leaves, again these are unscented and the flowers do not smell of elderflower.

The berries are also red in the autumn.

The Wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*) has flowers which do not smell like elderflower and the single leaves are rounded.

**Edible bits and uses:** Elder gives us a supply of lovely flowers in summer which can be infused to make teas, vinegars and jellies but traditionally it is used to create the wonderful elderflower cordial.

If the flowers are allowed to become berries then these can be infused to make a rich, gamey jelly, wonderful syrup or even a shrub (a combination of sugar and vinegar).

**The berries are toxic straight off the bush and need to be cooked.**

## ELDERFLOWER CORDIAL RECIPE

The beauty of this recipe is its simplicity. The hardest part is finding the sweetest, floral blooms out there. Do not pick elderflowers just after it has rained, they will not smell pleasant and this will affect your cordial, smell each one and ensure it is worthy to be used.

**1 litre boiling water**

**1 kg of white sugar**

**20-30 elderflowers**

*(the best smelling you can find)*

**Lemon Juice or Citric Acid**

*(available at Home Brew shops)*

- 1. Place your elderflowers in a pan** and cover with the litre of boiling water.
- 2. Add either the juice of one lemon or a heaped teaspoon of citric acid** (if you want a lemony taste use lemons, if not use the citric acid). Cover the pan with a lid and infuse for 24 hours.
- 3. Strain the infused liquid** through a fine sieve or muslin into a pan. For every 100ml of liquid add 100g of sugar and heat gently for 5-10 minutes until all the sugar is dissolved.
- 4. Allow to cool** and pour the remaining liquid into clean sterilised bottles. Keep in the fridge and use within 3 weeks.

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## ELDERBERRY SYRUP RECIPE

This simple syrup recipe uses the berries from elder in the autumn. It is useful to have in the kitchen and can be used in drinks, either in a cocktail or with your favourite mixer, and a big spoonful can be taken neat when you start to feel under the weather to boost your immune system.

- 1. Pick some elderberries**, the exact amount does not matter.
- 2. De-stalk the berries** (the best way to do this is with a fork and gently drag it through to separate the berries from the stalk – you do not want any part of the stalk in the cooking process) and rinse them.
- 3. Place the berries in a heavy-bottomed pan** and cover with enough water so that they are just covered. Bring to boil slowly and then simmer for 20-25 minutes, or until all the juice from the berries has been released.
- 4. Allow to cool** and pour the juice through muslin into a bowl to separate the liquid from the unwanted seeds and pulp. Measure how much juice you have.
- 5. For every 100ml of liquid add 100g of sugar.** Place in a clean pan and heat for around five minutes to dissolve the sugar. You can add spices such as clove, a cinnamon stick and star anise at this point if you want to make it more festive.
- 6. Pour into a sterilised bottle** and keep in fridge, use within 3 weeks.

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