

Elder

Tromán



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland

Sambucus nigra



DESCRIPTION

A shrub or small tree up to 5m (15ft). The leaves begin to open during mild spells in winter, sometimes as early as January and most leaves are fully expanded by April.

Elder flowers in May and June. The fruits are ripe in late September. Leaves fall from October to November in exposed sites, later where there is shelter.

Elder is found in clearings in woodlands and in scrub, but most frequently in disturbed habitats such as hedgerows and waste ground. It is most common on chalky soils and those with a high nitrogen content, occurring frequently around old cattle barns, where it can be a weed.

PROPAGATION

Elder grows well from seed or cuttings. Growing from seed is probably more satisfying.

Collect the berries in September and remove them from the stalks. Mash gently to separate the tiny seeds.

Mix them with compost, place in a labelled pot and keep outside for the winter. Protect from mice.

Check for signs of growth in early spring and sow onto seed-beds or trays. The resulting seedlings will grow rapidly and be ready for planting out in autumn.

INTERESTING FACTS

- Elder is an early colonizer of derelict land and can often be seen growing on old walls, where it can cause damage with its roots.
- None of our native trees grow more rapidly in its early years. Its presence in a hedge may be due to planting for the purpose of rapidly erecting a living screen.
- Any bit of its living wood will readily take root.
- The berries are still much used for making elderberry wine, which is credited with marvellous medicinal properties.

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