

## Elderberry Does More than Flavor Your Pancakes

The elderberry has been an important and popular part of European alternative medicine for ages. It is revered by herbal healers for its effectiveness in treating many ailments. As far back as 400 B.C., Hippocrates was referring to the elder tree as his "medicine chest."

Today, elderberry is being used for more than its popular medicinal purposes. It is also becoming more and more key as a functional ingredient in foods. In Austrian, German and English markets, the elderberry is gaining much respect for its flavor and health benefits.

### Where Does it Grow?

The elderberry primarily grows in Austria. The Beerenfrost Co-op in Austria is responsible for the majority of elderberry production, and more than 1,000 elderberry growers were involved in building the giant berry freezing facility. Harvesting occurs in September, and the elderberries must be cooled immediately or they will spoil. At Beerenfrost, they are chilled to 20 degrees Celcius in less than 24 hours.

Common foods made with elderberries are juices, jams, fruit yogurts and wines. However, demand for the extract made from elderberries is growing rapidly as a nutraceutical product. This means it is nutritionally and pharmaceutically beneficial.

### The Beneficial Berry

Research conducted in Europe shows that elderberries are a source of anthocyanins, which are dark purple pigments that seem to benefit health in many ways.

\* Antioxidants. The anthocyanins found in elderberries contain a higher concentration of antioxidants than Vitamins C and E. These antioxidants reduce oxidation and protect cells in the body.

\* Anti-viral activity. In vitro, elderberry extract inhibits replication of influenza A and B in cell cultures. Administering elderberry extract to flu patients reduces the length of time they present symptoms.

\* Cardiovascular protection. Elderberry extract reduces the oxidation of LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol. The oxidation of LDL cholesterol contributes significantly to cardiovascular disease.

\* Immune system. Studies are also revealing that elderberries enhance immune functions by boosting cytokine production. These are proteins that act as messengers to help regulate immune system function. As a result, they help the body fight disease. Scientists are attempting to trace these functions in the blood plasma to prove what effects they are actually having on the body at the cellular level.

\* Reducing stress. Stress tests have been performed with various bio-markers in places for glucose, magnesium and plasma chemical levels. The people in the studies were put through standard physical stress tests and their results were much better than originally anticipated.

### Other Benefits of the Elderberry

As a natural therapy and an herbal health formula, elderberry is a winning choice. It has been discovered to cleanse the digestive system and promote healthy elimination. It also protects the body from serious illness and disease. It reduces inflammation and helps to rid the body of impurities. It is even believed to aid in fighting cancer. Studies are ongoing to discover new health benefits offered by this powerful fruit.

There is an old saying in Austria: "Tip your hat to the elder." One would assume this means to an older, wiser person. Not so. This is actually in respect to the highly revered elder tree. For many, many years this tree and its deep purple berries have been considered one of the greatest healing plants found in nature.

As time progresses, countries such as the United States are learning about the highly regarded medicinal properties found in the elderberry. While it is not as easily accessible here in North America, it is possible to find good quality extracts of the berry in the better nutrition and herb stores.

The elderberry is said to enhance the body and the mind. As an added bonus, it tends to balance the emotions. Generally, when the body is healthy, the mind is happy.

## About the Author

More information [elder berry](#) is available at VitaNet &reg;, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanelonline.com/>

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