



MIDWEST
ELDERBERRY
COOPERATIVE

Native Elderberry Overview

- ◆ **All presentations, videos, reports are posted on <https://midwest-elderberry.coop/overview/reports--grants.html>.** The website has pages on pests, health benefits, cultivation, coop membership, events and marketing.
- ◆ Native black elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) is closely related to the European black elder (*Sambucus nigra*). While European elder is cultivated in tree form, native elder grows as bushy canes spreading like raspberries. Most research to date has focused on European elder, which has been cultivated for thousands of years for its healing benefits in traditional practices. Europe has 30,000+ acres of elderberry worth hundreds of millions: USA < 1000 acres.
- ◆ Native elderberries are **smaller but taste better** than the European berries. Native elder does not have the glycosides (proto-cyanides) that people worry about with the European berries. They ripen more unevenly than European varieties, but a great amount of diversity in the native elder genome remains undocumented with multiple cultivars identified by current limited research.
- ◆ **Market demand for native elder berry and flower ingredients greatly exceeds supply - especially for certified organic elderberries.** Over 95% of elderberry ingredients used in American made products is imported.
- ◆ Native black elder are broadly determinant and indeterminant as well as differing whether they will bear fruit on a first year cane or not.
- ◆ Organic cultivation challenges are similar to other northern berries with a focus on Japanese Beetles and Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) because the berries ripen from mid August to the end of September at the height of SWD population density during its annual life cycle.
- ◆ Native elder grows readily in the Midwest and provides many soil and pollinator benefits as well as supporting other wildlife like birds. Deer and birds may be a problem in some areas requiring fencing or netting but not all.
- ◆ Universally, the primary challenges involve crop handling from harvest to destemming and packing - all usually done by hand with growing mechanical assistance. The technology is possible but still under development.

Elder: the Little Berry that Could

<https://midwest-elderberry.coop/overview/elderberry--environment.html>

Minnesota has almost 16 million acres of corn and soybeans. University researchers estimate that a 100,000 acres of farmland needs to be repurposed as buffer zones along waterways with both biomass and berry options. In 2017 Minnesota had little under 800 acres of commercially grown berry crops. Minnesota consumer demand could support ten times that number of acres, which would still remain minuscule compared to corn and soybeans, yet provide huge environmental and nutritional benefits.

Enter the native Elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis*. Hardy and already adapted to North America east of the Rockies, elder flowers and berries provide abundant environmental benefits with their extensive root systems, rapid growth, fragrant flowers and nutrient dense berries. University of Missouri researchers counted 67 native pollinators on elder - both at its stem nectaries and on its flowers. The economic potential for US grown elder is huge. Best estimates cite over 30,000 acres of elder cultivated in Europe and many more are harvested out of the wild.

Missouri leads the USA in elderberry production with over 350 acres grown commercially. It is their number one berry crop economically. How did it get that way? Through collaboration between University of Missouri researchers and extension beginning about the year 2000 and the early elderberry growers, especially Terry Durham of Eridu Farms. Propagation began in 2004, and the first commercial fields of elder were planted in 2005.

The success of River Hills Harvest supports hundreds of acres of native (*Sambucus canadensis*), better tasting, elderberry. To support thousands of acres, Midwest Elderberry Cooperative is developing ingredient products that provide elder berry and flower flavor alternatives to many kinds of food, beverage and herbal products. The demand is there, and not only as a substitute for the imported 95% of elderberry sold in America today. Consumers and companies want locally grown, truly nutrient dense berries and flowers from our native perennial with positively so much good environmental and human health potential. MEC's Project 22-50 is our plan to get there.

Project 22-50

<https://midwest-elderberry.coop/cultivation/project-22-50.html>

At the 2019 Comprehensive Elderberry Workshop hosted annually by Terry Durham's River Hills Elderberry Producers and the University of Missouri Extension, Chris Patton announced an MEC goal of 2,250 (twenty-two fifty) profitable, producing acres of elderberry by 2025 harvest. Those acres will be made up of both small grower members selling directly to their customers as well as by commercial scale members who have equity in the coop through distribution rights ownership. (See Membership.) With a conservative yield average of 4,000 lb./acre, this goal should on average provide 10,000,000 lb. of collective inventory that includes berries sold directly by growers.