

ELDERFLOWER CORDIAL



GROWING THE FUTURE
TYFU'R DYFODOL

The frothy creamy white flowers that cover the elder tree come out in early summer, it is a sight I wait for with anticipation. The tree until this time is humble and easily missed growing in hedgerows and on wasteland.

In late May she appears like a bride gliding into the sunshine, attracting insects and foragers alike, looking to harvest the sweet-smelling abundance of flowers. She reclines back into the hedgerow only to re-appear in September clothed in a beautiful rich deep purple black coloured dress, again she is the centre of attention this time from birds and door mice, looking for the berries to sustain and nourish them through the winter months. The forager can also be found gathering the berries to make syrups, wine and jellies, making the most of nature's glorious bounty.

Health Benefits: Both elderflowers and elderberries have traditionally been used to treat colds and flu.

Elderflower Cordial Recipe

Gather the flowers on a sunny warm day (never wet), when the flower buds are just opening and the perfume is fragrant and fresh. Be sure to forage sensitively, leaving plenty of flowers behind for the pollinating insects and to allow the elderberries to ripen for the wildlife and the foragers to enjoy later in the year. There may also be other people in the area foraging too.

Use the fresh flowers as soon as possible after harvesting and dry the rest. As soon as I see the first elderflower I buy the ingredients for the cordial before going back to gather the flowers, when they are at their peak.

Ingredients:

- 25 -30 large heads of elderflowers
- 1kg sugar
- 2 lemons
- 1.5 litres water

Recipe:

1. Give the flowers a shake to dislodge any bugs, remove any leaves
2. Finely peel the lemons with a vegetable peeler to remove the zest and set aside
3. Slice the lemons
4. Bring the water and the sugar slowly to the boil in a large saucepan
5. Stir the syrup to ensure the sugar is dissolved
6. Add the sliced lemons, the zest and the elderflowers
7. Boil all the ingredients for one minute
8. Cover the saucepan with a cloth and leave to infuse for 12 hours
9. Strain using a muslin or clean tea towel into sterilised bottles and seal the bottles
10. The cordial can be kept in the fridge for up to six weeks and is ready to drink immediately
11. It can also be frozen into bags, containers or ice cubes
12. Dilute to taste with tap, sparkling or spring water
13. Serve with sprigs of mint, sliced lemon and ice
14. Who needs Pimms!?

Extra Activity: Elderflower and Rhubarb Cordial

To make a refreshing pink cordial, add 3 stalks of cooked rhubarb to the syrup together with the elderflowers and lemons at stage 6 in the recipe for elderflower cordial.

Note: Only elderberries and elderflowers can be consumed from the tree and only when cooked. They are mildly toxic and have an unpleasant taste when raw, cooking destroys the toxic chemicals. The leaves and branches contain toxic compounds, which may cause illness including nausea and vomiting if ingested.

Drying Elderflowers

Often there are too many elderflowers to use at once, drying surplus flowers is an ideal way of preserving the flowers to make use of them later in the year.

- Pick the blooms on a warm day shake off the bugs
- Lay out the flowers on a sheet of cardboard and place somewhere warm and dry with a good air circulation until the blooms are dry and crispy
- Pull the flowers off the stalks and store in an airtight container
- Use to make elderflower recipes and elderflower tea when required

Growing an Elder Tree in your Garden

If space is available then the elder is an ideal tree to grow in the garden.

The elder is a medium sized tree that grows up to 10 meters tall. Its height can be controlled by pruning. The elder is a 'bullet proof' tree that grows in all aspects and in all soils except sand.

It is beneficial to wildlife as the flowers in the early summer attract pollinating insects. In autumn the berries provide food for the birds and some small mammals.

Pruning: The flowers grow on the young branches that are up to three years old. Pruning is carried out after the second year and should be done annually in early spring. Control the height and remove all dead broken and weak branches. Elder trees grow an estimated 30-60cm each year.

A Bit of Fun - Make a Pea Shooter: The hollow branches of the elder tree are perfect for turning into pea shooters.

GROWING THE FUTURE

The Growing the Future project at the National Botanic Garden of Wales is a five-year project to champion Welsh horticulture, plants for pollinators, the protection of wildlife and the virtues of growing plants for food, fun, health and well-being.

Whether you are a seasoned gardener, a fledgling grower or a budding beekeeper – we want to help provide training, information and support to you. For more information on the project's events and courses, please visit botanicgarden.wales/science/growing-the-future.

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