

Elderberry: A flu's worst nightmare!

The black elder tree, also called the elderberry tree, has a rich, longstanding history of folklore. According to Earl Mindell in his Herb Bible, which provides folkloric factoids, during the Middle Ages, the English believed that it was the favorite tree of witches, who would take respite among its branches. To disturb such a tree would mean to incur the witch's wrath. Also, the tree was said to have mystical abilities, and to have such an arboreal on one's property meant good luck.

Historically, elderberry's most common use has been as a tea or cordial, simmered in boiling water and then sipped for its health-promoting benefits during the cold weather season. Elderberry also is an excellent sudorific (sweat inducer) and diuretic, and a significant source of vitamins A,B and C. Its berries, in particular, have been found to contain compounds that can stop a cold or flu in its tracks, an accomplishment that still has not found its way into OTC pharmaceutical products or vaccines.

Dr Madeleine Mumcuoglu, Ph.D., a virologist based in Israel, is credited for discovering the mechanism of action of elderberry extract on colds and flu. In her booklet, Sambucus, Black Elderberry Extract, subtitled, A breakthrough in the treatment of influenza, she describes what a flu



virus is and how it takes hold in the body, as well as providing information on how the black elderberry extract helps thwart the invasion of the virus

In the laboratory, Dr. Mumcuoglu discovered that the active ingredients in elderberry "disarm" the hemagglutinin by binding to them, which effectively prevents the piercing of the cellular membranes. "The viral spikes are covered with an enzyme called neuraminidase. This enzyme acts to break down the cell wall. Bioflavonoids, also present in high concentration in elderberries, may inhibit the action of this enzyme," she writes.

The tree also yields other healing aspects, according to C.J. Puotinen, author of Herbs to Help You Breathe Freely. Elder flowers from the black elder tree contain tannins that have been shown to dry up excess mucus. Leaves from the tree also have been shown to have expectorant properties. Elder is used for urinary complaints, edema and rheumatic problems.

Food for Thought has capsules, tablets, lozenges, tea and extracts. Don't get caught unprotected this cold and flu season.

