



## Elderberries are native to Oklahoma

If you're looking to grow some fruit in the landscape, consider the elderberry. While this fruit may not be well known, it is native to Oklahoma and often is harvested in the wild and can be made into jams, jellies, pie, juice and wine. Another benefit of elderberries is they are a great source of vitamin C, iron and antioxidants.

If you decide to hop on the elderberry wagon, choose a site in the landscape that is shaded and has good air circulation. This will help reduce leaf and disease issues. Also, make sure the area has good drainage.

Gardeners may have a difficult time finding elderberry cultivars due simply to limited demand, however, several cultivars are available through online sources. Try to find plants that are a year old. Older plants can be used, but are typically less vigorous. Another option is to propagate your own plants from wild plants.

Now is a great time to plant elderberries. Planting them on raised berms can be beneficial in areas where poor water drainage is a problem. Set dormant plants as soon as you get them from the nursery, or transplant them directly from the propagation bed. Be sure to remove any damaged or broken parts and cut back the top portions to 8 to 10 inches. Set the plant with the lowest branch at or just below the soil line, with each plant about 8 feet apart in rows. Water thoroughly to settle the soil around the roots.

Because elderberries are only partially self-fruitful, two or more cultivars should be planted near each other to provide for cross-pollination.

Elderberries likely will require yearly applications of nitrogen. Gardeners should put 1 or 2 tablespoons of fertilizers such as ammonium sulfate, ammonium nitrate or urea annually in the spring on young plants. Older plants should get 3 to 4 tablespoons of the same fertilizer in the spring. Nitrogen also can be supplied by compost or manures. Soil tests should be done occasionally to determine phosphorous and potassium needs.

You can judge the need for fertilizers by looking at the bush. If it's vigorous and producing a lot of new growth, reduce the nitrogen by half. You could even eliminate it altogether. If growth is moderate, but the plants still appear thrifty, apply the recommended amount. Increase the nitrogen application by half if you observe new canes that appear to be in poor condition.

We know how hot the summers in Oklahoma can be, so keep in mind elderberries aren't drought tolerant and irrigation is necessary during dry periods. Drip irrigation works well, and mulching will help conserve soil moisture.

Elderberries aren't competitive with weeds. Control perennial weeds before planting. Shallow cultivation will help control weeds after planting. Mulch can be used to suppress weeds and retain soil moisture. Consider bark chips, wood chips, sawdust, straw and others.

When pruning elderberries, simply remove weak or broken canes, leaving six to eight vigorous canes to plant. If an elderberry bush has been ignored for some time, reinvigorate it by removing old canes and thinning new shoot growth.

You'll likely get a small crop of berries in the first year. Production on mature plants starting in the third year can range from 12 to 15 pounds per plant. Harvest typically takes place from mid-August to mid-September. For more information on cultivar selection and managing elderberries in the landscape, see OSU Extension's fact sheet [HLA-6256 Growing Elderberries in Oklahoma](#).

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