

TITLE: Elderberries – When and How to Prune

Description: Elderberry is a native, cane-growing shrub. It easily grows to heights of 10 feet, and 4 feet wide. It sends up many canes that flower and fruit, primarily in their 2nd and 3rd years.

Objective(s): If you are growing elderberry for the fruits, you should plan to prune as described in the video every year. If you are not growing elderberry for the fruits, pruning is not necessary except for dealing with the four D’s (dead, damaged, diseased, dysfunctional)

WHAT: The American elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis*, is a shrub with individual canes that grow in a clump and reach 4 to 15 feet in height. It is indigenous to North America, with a range from Nova Scotia to Minnesota and south to Florida and Texas. Elderberry produces fruit on current year growth (new wood), on mostly second-year canes.



WHY: To keep the plant vigorous and healthy, and to have fruit to harvest each summer/fall, plan to prune every year.

WHEN: Prune in late winter, while the plant is still dormant. For east TN, that is January to mid-February. (The 4 D’s can be pruned at any time.)

WHERE: Start at the bottom of the Elderberry plant, removing the oldest canes first.

HOW: Remove all 3-year-old and older canes, as close to the ground as possible -- as these older canes rarely bear fruit. (Older canes also tend to lose vigor, weaken, and break.) Then remove dead, damaged, diseased, or dysfunctional canes. Finish by tipping back any spindly canes.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Healthy elderberry plants usually produce several new canes each year
 - New canes attain their full height during their first year.
- The most fruitful canes are two years old with several lateral branches.
- Fruit clusters are born terminally on the current season's growth.
- Older canes lose vigor and weaken after 3 years, and should be removed at ground level along with any dead, broken, or weak canes. Remove old canes the dormant season.
- Annual pruning should be in late winter. Try to keep an equal number of 1-, 2-, and 3-yearold canes.

Additional Resources / References:

Penn State Extension, *Home Fruit Plantings: Elderberries*

<https://extension.psu.edu/home-fruit-plantings-elderberries>

Michigan State Extension, *Growing Elderberry in the Garden*

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/elderberries_an_edible_landscape_plant

Utah State Extension, *Elderberry in the Garden*

https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1630&context=extension_curall

Knox County Master Gardeners website: www.knoxcountymastergardener.org

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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