

***Sambucus racemosa*, Red Elderberry**

General Botanical Characteristics

Sambucus racemosa, a deciduous shrub from 20 inches to 20 feet in height. Its leaves are large, opposite, compound with 5 – 9 leaflets. The stems are usually young, soft, and pithy, twigs but the wood is quite hard. The creamy white flowers are in pyramidal heads and followed by round, berry-like fruits called drupes. The fruit normally contains 2-4 seeds and is usually bright red. It propagates by seed following cold stratification.



Seasonal Development

The growing season usually begins in early June, and flower buds begin to open from mid-June to early July. Fruits and seeds of the Red Elderberry mature between late July and mid-August.

Distribution/Habitat

Sambucus racemosa is found across North America from Newfoundland to Alaska. It is restricted to moist, cool sites in the south, extending into California in the coastal mountains, Arizona and New Mexico in the Rockies, and Georgia and Tennessee in the Appalachian highlands. Red elderberry is not well adapted to warm climates and in the southern part of its range. There it is found in cooler uplands, swamps, and along cool drainages

Interesting Facts

- Red elderberry is moderately fire resistant, re-sprouting from rhizomes or root crowns following fire.
- The hollow stems have been fashioned into flutes and blowguns.

References

US Forest Service Shrub Database. 9 November 2002,
<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/index.html>

Photo from Washington State Department of Transportation, Environmental Affairs.
December 2002, <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/eesc/environmental/>