

# Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month

NOVEMBER 2015

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



*Photos by Will Stuart*



*Thrasher*

**Bird  
Friendly**  
NATIVE PLANTS

## *Sambucus canadensis* Elderberry

### Wildlife Magnet

Elderberry is highly valued for its wildlife services providing pollen and nectar for pollinators and nesting sites, shelter and food for birds. For breeding birds, the 89 species of caterpillars it supports are especially important. Your Elderberry might attract robins, thrushes, mockingbirds, catbirds, thrashers, grosbeaks, buntings, cardinals, finches, sparrows, towhees, tanagers, vireos, orioles or woodpeckers.

### Understory Shrub

Elderberry prefers a moist or evenly wet, sunny location. It can tolerate slightly drier soils,

once established. With its sprawling habit, Elderberry is best located on meadow and woodland edges. It can grow to 10 feet tall and 5 feet wide. This fast growing and hardy plant is relatively pest free, and reseeds and spreads to form a thicket, if not controlled.

*Sambucus canadensis* is deciduous. A profusion of dark-purple, juicy berries form in August and early September. Due to its height, Elderberry can be used as an informal border or screen, if space permits. Pruning the canes to the ground in winter-

or early spring produces shrubbier growth and helps control its size.

### Medicinal Plant Uses

Traditionally, Elderberry was used for medicinal purposes by native Americans and European settlers. It is high in vitamins A and C, iron and antioxidants. The berries can be added to pancakes or used to make jellies, jams, wines and sauces. Traditional Elderberry tonics have been used to treat colds and flu, headaches, and as a poultice for cuts and sores or swollen limbs.

There are several recipes on the web for Elderberry tonic, however the bark, root, leaves and unripe fruits are toxic (upset stomach) when eaten.

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society and Audubon North Carolina.

### Native Bird Food

Elderberry makes a good substitute for berries of invasive *Nandina* and *Autumn Olive*. The numerous caterpillars it supports are an especially important food source for breeding birds.



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