



RESPECT YOUR ELDERS

ELDERFLOWERS are one of nature's finest edible treasures and for me, the taste of Summer. Many years over I have served my Elderflower Cordial at my Open Garden for Charity events. During June, when the fresh shoots of Spring start to look (and taste) tired and other bounty is still to fruit, their elegant, sweet, heady fragrance translates into delicious drinks and desserts. Occasionally, this delightful scent can develop from Muscat bananas through musky to cat pee.

You should be able to avoid this if you harvest them on bright, sunny mornings. Good luck finding them this Summer.

The time to start picking the Elder heads is when they look exactly as they do in the picture on the above left.

Not too open and over flowered, releasing all their pollen, however 'JUST' at the point of being in perfect bloom. This is the time to pounce on many of the fields around Ruislip, and pick your Elder Heads.

I will bring you a great Elderflower Cordial recipe later on, however let me tell you a little bit about the Sambucas Nigra.

Elder is a common low-growing large shrub, that produces creamy-white umbeliferous flower heads from mid-May to July. So they should not be hard to come by in Ruislip's fields and green areas, as they normally line the edges of fields.

Many of us have varieties in our own gardens. The fantastic Sambucas Nigra "Black Beauty" (*Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Gerda') or the "Pink Lace" are both fantastic space fillers.

Elder was widely referred to as 'The Witch's Tree' and to hang a cradle from its boughs would invite her wrath. Nevertheless, it was considered bad luck not to have one near your house. On no account should you burn elder if you are of a superstitious nature as this will surely curse you for eternity.

Elder got its name from the Anglo-Saxon word ALED which means fire. Due to its fantastic burning properties due to its hollow stems.

The RCHS has the great pleasure of welcoming Christine Walkden from BBC1 on Tuesday May 26th at 8pm for an "Evening with Christine Walkden". There are a few tickets still remaining priced at £10 each. Call Warren on 01923 451616.

Another old name for Elder is Ellhorn, hinting at the use of hollowed Elder branches as a furnace.

In Victorian times distilled Elderflower water was used as a highly valued emollient lotion, said to cleanse the skin, keeping it young and free of freckles and blemishes. Though fallen into disrespect for a number of years, Elderflower water has recently regained some popularity and is now once again produced commercially.

Many people believe that the Elder has terrific medical benefits and many people use parts of the Elder bush for treatments.

HOMEMADE ELDERFLOWER CORDIAL

A few guidelines as you go to pick the Elder heads...

NEVER cover or tie the bags up as the flowers will sweat, turn brown and cant be used. Leave them in an open bag in the shade until you are ready to use them. **NO STALKS**, when picking a flower simply slide your fingers up the stalk and snap the flower off.

Make sure you pick ELDER and not COW PARSLEY! You would be stunned at how many people do this and wonder why their cordial isn't quite as it should be!

Ok, now for the best bit, all you will need is a large pan and a good fine sieve, together with the following to make 3-4 bottles of Elderflower Cordial.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2.5kg granulated sugar
- 1.5 litres of water
- 2 lemons
- 30 FRESH Elderflower heads
- 85g of Citric Acid (*available from Chemists*)

METHOD:

Boil the sugar and water together for a good 3-4 minutes. Turn off heat.

Add the zest and juice of the lemons and the citric Acid. Wash the flower heads in COLD water gently just to remove any dirt etc. If they look clean you really don't need to do this.

Add the flower heads to the hot liquid. Stir well.

Cover with cling film for 48 Hours and leave to go cold.

Pass the liquid through a fine sieve at least three times, and bottle.

Keep in the fridge and use as required, this cordial should keep at least a year. Dilute to taste, try using sparkling water to make a refreshing drink on a hot Summers day!

ENJOY!

Next month we will feature our Mail Bag. Please send your questions to the RCHS at rchstalks@gmail.com

Warren