

# Red-berried elder (*Sambucus racemosa*)

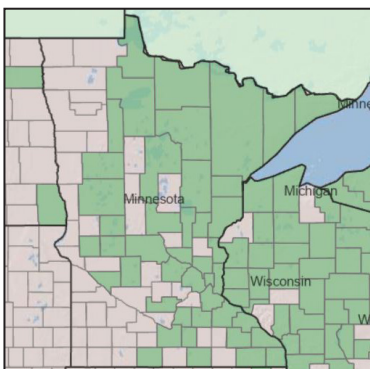
**Family: Moschatel  
(Adoxaceae)**

**DESCRIPTION:** Red-berried elder is a shade-tolerant shrub native to most of Minnesota that thrives in partly shady gardens. It is typically found along woodland edges, streambanks and open woods. Its fragrant white flowers are a welcome sign of spring in April and May.

**USES:** Red-berried elder can be used as a shrub border. The early spring flowers provide nectar for pollinators and the berries feed nesting birds. Foliage can host caterpillars of many moth species, including the white-lined sphinx, snowberry clearwing and **cecropia** (pictured). Raw berries are toxic to humans but can be edible if cooked.

**REFERENCES:**

- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
- [Three Rivers Park District](#)
- Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota; Welby R. Smith, University of Minnesota Press
- [Native Plant Trust](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



## Planting Recommendations

If planted in the sun, red-berried elder will spread by root suckers. The shrub does well in partial shade with three to six hours of sun per day. It does not require much water but will suffer in extremely dry conditions. This makes it a perfect plant for shady rain gardens, where water collects and drains quickly. Natural mulch, such as hardwood or leaves, can be used to retain soil and water, but there is no need to fertilize native plants. Prune in winter or

early spring to keep a desirable form and keep cut branches on site until late spring to allow pollinators to overwinter in the hollow stems. Red-berried elder can be purchased at native plant providers as seed or potted shrubs. To grow from seed, collect red berries, remove the fruit and rinse the seeds. Seeds can be stored in damp sand in the fridge until spring or can be planted immediately in pots with a screen on top to protect them from squirrels.

**Developed by Genevieve Brand**, assistant regional ecologist at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, who has been growing and gardening with Minnesota native plants since 2005



Photo Credits: Genevieve Brand

**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:**  
FACU

**ID:** Leaves are opposite, toothed and compound and the stem has a purple tinge. Arranged in a cone-shaped raceme (similar to lilac flower heads), the white flowers are followed by berries that turn red when ripe.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:** Common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) flowers in July and produces black fruit. Its leaf stems lack the purple color usually found in red-berried elder.