

Elderberries-A Native Plant with Value-Added Processing Potential

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Often attributed to *Hippocrates*, the principle of viewing food as a medicine and vice versa is an important principle of long-term health. For example, elderberries are a distinct food and medicinal plant. Within the last 10 years, the market for elderberry products has expanded. Elderberry fruit, flowers and bark have phytochemical compounds which have been documented to prevent viruses and some cancers. Elderberries are native to North America and thrive in the Central Appalachian region. Often elderberries grow wild along creeks and roadsides in areas that are moist but not saturated with water. In addition to growing as a wild crop, there are several tame varieties of black elderberry which can be planted similar to blackberries or raspberries. The tame varieties tend to have higher berry yields and are easier to harvest compared to wild elderberries.

Elderberry fruit would produce the highest yield per plant relative to harvesting and marketing elderflowers. In addition, since elderberries are harvested over a relatively short period of time in late summer, processing the fruit into a value-added product would enable the crop to be sold throughout the year. Elderberries are sold primarily as an ingredient which adds flavor and provides supplemental health benefits. The fruit is not typically eaten as a fresh berry like blackberries but is incorporated into other ingredients or processed into products such as wine, jams, jellies, pies and syrups (Figure 1). Since elderberries have unique flavor and health attributes, this creates a wide market for the crop. Marketing elderberries as primarily a food or beverage without health claims may be the easiest marketing method for new producers, Although elderberries have distinct health benefits, making health claims about products is

regulated by the Food and Drug Administration as well as state laws and processors must adhere to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).

Elderberry fruit can be sold fresh or frozen to consumers who wish to process it into other products at their home or business. However, value added processing can be done by farmers who harvest elderberries on their land. A farm business plan must be developed for the elderberry products. The first step would be to determine how the product would be marketed such as online sales or farmers' markets. Secondly, the decision of what type(s) of elderberry product to process such as wine, jams, pies or syrups must be made. The third step would be deciding if the products can be made in a home kitchen or may require a certified kitchen or copacker facility. Research on pricing, consumer demand and costs of production per unit must be done to determine if the product is ultimately profitable.

In 2023, WVU Extension will begin working with landowners to harvest wild elderberries and evaluate the newest, tame cultivars for commercial production. The results of this multi-year project funded by P qvj gcu'SARE will provide valuable information on how this native plant can be grown, harvested, processed and marketed as a profitable crop for West Virginia landowners.

Variety	Description & Characteristics
Adams-1	Selected in NY from wild species. Very winter hardy. Adams-2 has large fruit and fruits early.
Adams-2	
Bob Gordon	Released from Univ. of MO in 2011. Flowers from late May through mid-June with harvest in July and August. Sweet berries.
Johns	Open-pollinated Adams 1 or 2. Fruit ripens in Mid-August
Marge	European elderberry
Nova	Ripens in early August
Pocahontas	Late fruiting variety
Samdal	European elderberry. Requires cross-pollination with 'Samyl'
Samyl	European elderberry Requires cross-pollination with 'Samdal'
York	Early fruiting
Wyldewood	Selected from Mo. Large flower clusters,



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