



ELDERBERRY CORDIAL

Sip Your Way to Better
Health This Winter

BY CHERYL FROMHOLZER
PHOTOS BY STACY VENTURA

As an herbalist and herbal educator, I have always used food as medicine and like to incorporate herbs with health-promoting qualities into food and drink whenever I can.

The use of herbs, berries and barks infused into distilled spirits dates back hundreds, if not thousands, of years, and these tinctures have long been hailed for their restorative and life-giving qualities.

The elder or elderberry tree (Latin name *Sambucus*) is native to Marin County, where you'll find them growing along waterways. Historical references to the use of elder date back to the Greeks and the tree even garnered a nod in the popular Harry Potter book series: The most powerful wand in the land was made from elder wood.

The ancients recognized its power and it is, indeed, one of the best natural medicines for the cold and flu season. Sipped daily during the fall and winter months, this Elderberry Cordial made with the berries of the tree can keep colds and flus from progressing. Scientific studies have shown elder is effective in-vitro against 10 strains of influenza virus. It has also been noted to decrease the intensity and reduce the duration of flu symptoms in a double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized study.

Elder preparations not only stimulate immune activity, but also directly inhibit the influenza virus by disarming the virus of its ability to invade healthy cells and multiply there. This is especially noteworthy because, although the influenza virus mutates every year, its means of penetrating cells (and using them to make copies of itself) remains largely the same. So, while new flu shots need to be created each year, elderberry acts effectively regardless of the mutations.

Cheryl Fromholzer is a traditional western herbalist and herbal educator. She is the owner of Gathering Thyme, an herb and wellness shop in downtown San Anselmo. Gathering Thyme offers high-quality organic herbs and spices, including the ones used in this recipe, as well as a full line of professional nutritional supplements and organic body care. Cheryl also offers a yearlong herbal studies program, "Explorations in Traditional Western Herbalism." For more information, stop by Gathering Thyme in person or at GatheringThyme.com.



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ELDERBERRY CORDIAL

SUPPLIES

Quart-sized glass jar with tight-fitting lid
Strainer
Funnel
Cheesecloth
Decorative bottle for storage

INGREDIENTS

1¼ cups dried elderberries
2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger
1 cinnamon stick, crushed
¼ cup dried rosehips
2 tablespoons dried orange peel
About 3 cups brandy
Honey, to taste (maple syrup or other sweetener can be substituted)

TO PREPARE

Add elderberries, ginger, cinnamon, rosehips and orange peel to a quart-sized glass jar. Add brandy to fill the jar and cover with a lid. Label the jar with contents and the date. Set aside in a cool, dark place for 3–4 weeks.

When ready to decant, strain the contents of the jar through multiple layers of cheesecloth over a large bowl. Once the liquid has been drained out, give the contents of the cheesecloth a squeeze to release remaining liquid into the bowl. Discard remaining solids into your compost.

For every 1 cup of liquid retained, add ½ cup honey (more or less honey to taste). Mix thoroughly to incorporate the honey into the brandy-elderberry mixture.

Use a funnel to pour the cordial into a decorative bottle for storage, or gift giving.

This recipe can also be made with fresh elderberries—just increase the amount of berries per recipe to approximately 2 cups.

A cordial made with fresh elderberries will last about a year. Dried berry cordials will last for years and can improve nicely with age. Cordials do not need to be refrigerated since the alcohol content is above 20%.

As a preventative, sip at least 1 ounce of the cordial every day. If you do get sick, increase your “dosage” to ½ ounce 4–6 times a day until your symptoms have disappeared.

Cordials can be sipped in small glasses or drizzled over your favorite dessert. However you enjoy them, you can feel good about boosting your immunity to colds and flus this winter-time. Cheers!

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