

WACD PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

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Red Elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*)

Distribution

Species of Red Elderberry are widely distributed through North America in riparian environments, woodlands, and other moist habitats at low to mid elevations.

Growth Habit

Red Elderberry is a large, sprawling, upright deciduous shrub. It grows from 15 to 30 feet tall, and spreads from 7 to 15 feet wide. Its reddish-brown warty stems hold lance shaped leaflets. In the spring this tall shrub is decorated with creamy white odorous flower clusters.

Adaptability

Red Elderberry can be found growing in a wide range of sites from wet to dry and sunny to shady, and tolerates a variety of soils. It favors stream banks, swampy thickets, moist clearings and open forests.

Comments

- Red Elderberry has a variety of uses as a conservation species, including riparian habitat restoration, erosion control, shelter belts, and wildlife habitat improvement.
- It is quick to establish, and fast growing once established.
- Its red berries are considered inedible, though aboriginal peoples once ate them upon occasion, but only when cooked. The raw berries cause nausea.
- The most common form of Red Elderberry in the region is *Sambucus racemosa ssp. pubens var. arborescens*. Other varieties found include Black Elderberry, *S. racemosa ssp. pubens var. melanocarpa*, which has black berries, and the rare white berried form, *S. racemosa ssp. pubens var. leucocarpa*.

