

pubens (red-berried elder). The two are somewhat similar in appearance, although there are key differences.

Perhaps the distinction most obvious to the casual observer lies with the fruit. That of the red-berried elder appears in June or July, while the berries of the common elder, are not apparent until August or September. Although the fruit of the red-berried elder is generally bright scarlet and easily distinguished from the darker berry of the common elder, there is a variety of the red-berried elder with very dark fruit (var. *melanocarpus*). This is notable, as the fruit of the red-berried elder is quite toxic when unripe and retains strong laxative and purgative properties even when mature. Berries of the common elder have no such unpleasantness thus it is important to properly identify the species if collecting berries for jellies, wine or any other food or drink. Berries of both species are very high in Vitamin C - higher even than oranges or tomatoes. With the exception of the berries and flowers, all other parts of both species are considered toxic to humans. It has been reported that children have become ill from using the hollowed-out branches as blowguns (Gaudet, 1979), although at least one person I know has admitted to engaging in this activity without any adverse effects. Other differences between the species are given below.

Aspect	Common Elder	Red-Berried Elder
Habitat	moist areas	drier areas
Height	< 8 feet	< 12 feet
Bud; Twig	Greenish, 0.25 inch wide; white pith	Brownish, up to 0.50 inch wide; orange-brown pith
Bark	Greenish in young plants, brown or grey in mature plants	Light brown or grey
Flowers	Creamy white flat clusters seen in June to August	C r e a m y w h i t e pyramid-shaped clusters seen in April to May

Finally, in addition to its extensive use to humans, elder is a valuable shrub to wildlife. Berries are an important food source for a variety of birds including grouse, blue jay, robin, waxwing, and grosbeak; mammals such as skunk, raccoon, hare, fox, and possibly coyote also feed on the berries. Buds and twigs are eaten by grouse and hare. A more detailed account of wildlife uses and

¹ Populus = poplar; Grand = large; Dent = tooth (think dentist)