

# Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, September, 2021



## Garden Diary: Fall Planting Time

Summer seems to always fly faster than other seasons for me. As Autumn approaches, it is a good time to take a look at our gardening efforts with the next season in mind. What worked, what didn't and what changes we would like to plan for. Fall is a perfect time to add to the garden, to plant a tree or shrub or prepare a new area to plant in the Spring. That is the fun of gardening. We are never finished and every garden is an ongoing work in progress.

It's time in later fall to cut back perennials and perhaps divide some well established plants. Create a tapestry of color, texture, and heights to harmonize and compliment by combining groups of 3,5, or even 7 plants of one variety. Fall is an excellent time to plant perennials.



The soil is warmer, the temperatures are easier to work in and insects are fewer.

When adding plants to the garden, the soil is our most important asset and fall is the best time to pile on some manure to enrich your garden during the winter. Perhaps you want to create a pollinator garden with plants like echinacea, bee balm, laven-

der, and shasta daisies all of which attract bees. I recommend the Shasta variety called Becky for a longer bloom time.



Fall is for planting bulbs and who doesn't love the sight of the first snowdrops or crocus as winter fades. The bees depend on this early nectar. Bulbs can take your garden from winter 'til fall. Snowdrops were blooming end of January last year in Rockport. One can learn to position companion plants so that foliage is hidden as the bulb fades with the companion plant covering most of the bulb foliage. This method will keep the garden looking lovely. Astilbes, daisies, and taller grasses all work well as so do smaller shrubs.

Fall is a wonderful time to keep gardening and making it interesting with some fresh planting choices and design enhancement. The earth gives to us and we give back to the earth. That is the circle we experience when we get our hands in the dirt and experience the joy of gardening filled with beauty and unending surprises.

—Peggy Coonley





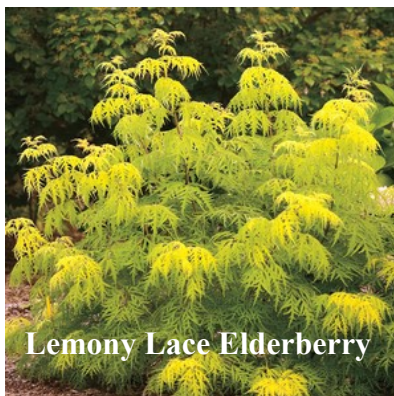
## The Garden Cart: American Elderberry

My mother was a champion canner. Every summer we made pickles, juice and “put up” just about every vegetable and fruit she could find at the Farmer’s Market in Pittsburgh. The family favorite was her elderberry jelly, hands down. We had a stand at the edge of the woods behind our house and it always amazed me that we could eat something from the forest.

American elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis*, is a moderately-fast growing bush that can reach up to 12 feet tall and 6 feet across once mature. It’s a multi-stemmed shrub with an easygoing nature. It can tolerate a variety of different growing conditions ranging from wet soil and rocky terrain to bright sun and lots of shade. That being said, it prefers a spot that boasts full sun or partial shade. It can be planted outdoors successfully in USDA zones 3 through 9 and I chose it to highlight this month because fall is a great time to plant it.

It’s a native thicket-forming shrub with an arching habit. It has small white flowers (June) that are borne in dense clusters with dark purple drooping fruit clusters in late summer to fall. This shrub does tend to form a lot of suckers. This can be a beneficial characteristic if you’re trying to populate a native garden.

American elderberry isn’t picky about its temperature conditions, given its wide range of hardiness zones. It loves a moist location. It can tolerate only short periods of drought. The plant’s roots are very close



Lemony Lace Elderberry

to the surface, so if the top layer of soil is dry, it’s a good indication that the roots are too. The root structure makes it perfect for erosion control in moist sites.

Historically used by Native Americans, the elderberry is widely known for its culinary qualities. It is

known for jellies, preserves, pies, syrups, tonics and wines. The berries must be cooked to break down the toxic elements of cyanogenic



Black Lace Elderberry

glycoside and alkaloids. Once cooked, the fruits are safe to eat. Harvest in August or September, if you can beat the birds to the fruit. I visited my secret stash of bushes on Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> (not telling) and it was picked clean. Elderberry also has immune boosting properties and is near the top of the list of antioxidants.

As you might imagine, butterflies and other insects are attracted to the blooms. Its fruits are eaten by mammals and many species of songbirds. It also makes an excellent nesting site. Deer browse the leaves, twigs and fruit, so beware.

Some varieties of elderberry are beautiful and completely suitable as a focal point for a cottage or formal garden, such as Black Lace or Lemony Lace Elderberries (which are not native.) Most are better suited planted in the back of a garden, along a fence row, or as a deciduous hedgerow.

With its intoxicating fruit and beauty, the American Elderberry is an excellent choice to plant this fall.

### Attributes:

Height: 5-12 feet

Spread: 3-6 feet

Hardiness Zone: 3-9

Bloom time: Early summer

Exposure: Full Sun, Partial Shade

Soil Moisture: Moist, well drained

Maintenance: Low

Attracts: Bees, Butterflies and Birds

Fruit: Delicious, but toxic if not cooked

—Lisa Simms

