Native Plant of the Month

Red Elderberry  
*Sambucus racemosa*

- Red elderberry is named for its red clusters of berries. It is closely related to blue elderberry.
- Red elderberries are a favorite food for many birds such as grosbeaks, finches, and robins.
- The foliage is browsed by deer and elk. This plant produces a bitter chemical to protect itself when over-browsed.
- Red elderberry colonizes disturbed areas such as landslides and logging clear-cuts and is part of the early succession of a forest ecology.
- The whole plant is somewhat toxic, and wild red elderberries are best left for the birds.

Landscape Value

Red elderberry is an excellent addition to the landscape. It is especially valuable for the butterfly and wildlife garden as it provides nectar, berries, and foliage for birds, small mammals, butterflies, and their larva.

Its arching pyramidal form works well in the back of a perennial border, or along the edge of woodland forest. In spring it is covered with lilac-shaped blooms and followed by striking clusters of red berries in summer.

Plant red elderberry with tall Oregon grape, oceanspray, mock orange, and Pacific ninebark to create a fine woodland hedgerow.

Text by Heidi Bohan  
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