Johnny's Selected Seeds
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Elderberries

Planting Instructions for 32-Cell Plugs

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ELDERBERRIES (*Sambucus nigra*)

Check your plants immediately upon receipt. Remove from packaging and transplant as soon as possible. If you are unable to transplant them right away, we recommend the following:

- **Dormant plant plugs that have not yet leafed out are frost tolerant. Check the plugs themselves; they should be damp (but not soaked); moisten if dry. Place plants back inside the liner and box and store in a refrigerator or cool location for up to 1 week at 32–40°F/0–4°C. Keep the roots damp.**

- **If plants have developed leaves, or planting is delayed more than a week, pot plugs up into deep containers/pots filled with a quality planting mix (such as Johnny's 512 mix) and place in a cool, shaded area such as a garage or basement. Protect from deep freezes (below 32°F/0°C). Keep plants moist, but do not overwater as this will encourage root rot. Plant out as soon as possible.**

GENERAL CULTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

LIFE CYCLE
Perennial. Hardiness varies by variety; refer to our catalog or website descriptions for more information.

SPECS
Approx. 25 plants/100' row, or approx. 850 plants/acre at 5' spacing, rows 10' apart.

SITE SELECTION/BED PREPARATION:
While elderberries are tolerant of a wide variety of soil types and fertility, they perform best in consistently moist, fertile, well-drained soils with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5. Elderberries will perform well in heavy soils provided there is adequate drainage; plant health and flower/fruit quality will decline quickly if plants endure extended periods of standing water. Raised beds are a good option if your site is poorly drained. Elderberries will not thrive in sandy soils due to the lack of necessary nutrient content and poor moisture retention.

While wild types will tolerate partial sun/shade, commercial elderberries thrive with generous spacing and full sun.

Prepare your beds well ahead of when you plant your elderberries so you have ample time to assess the state of your soil and adjust pH and nutrient deficiencies where necessary. It is a good idea to conduct a soil test a minimum of 6 months prior to planting. It is very important to ensure proper pH levels prior to planting as it is very difficult to change pH after plants have become established. To increase pH, garden lime remains the most efficient method. To decrease pH, use elemental sulfur or organic amendments such as compost or peat.

FERTILITY
Elderberries do not require fertilizer during the establishment year as they derive many of the nutrients they require from existing organic matter in the soil. In subsequent years, fertilize at the beginning of the season with a 10-10-10 fertilizer (or equivalent), manure, blood meal, or compost.

PLANTING
Adequate spacing is important for best yields. Beds should be approximately 2' wide and 10–12' apart. Space plants 3–6' apart in the row. In either Spring or Fall, transplant plugs deeply enough to cover plug with 1/2–1" garden soil. Spring plantings are

generally more successful than Fall plantings when beds have been prepared well ahead of time. Irrigate well after transplanting.

IRRIGATION
Elderberries will not tolerate drought conditions. Proper soil moisture is essential during the establishment-year and drip irrigation is the best method. After establishment, from flowering through harvest, plants should receive a minimum of 1" of water per week for optimum fruit production. Mulch to keep the soil evenly moist and to prevent weeds. Mulch plants with a 3–4" layer of straw or wood chips to aid in moisture retention, discourage weed growth, and contribute more organic matter to the soil. Landscape fabric may also be used for weed control and to retain moisture. Plastic mulch is not recommended due to the long-term nature of elderberry plantings.

WEED CONTROL
Elderberries do not compete well with aggressive weed pressure, so it is important to control weeds fastidiously. We recommend planting your elderberries in an area that has been tilled, tarped, and/or cover-cropped to suppress perennial weeds. Woodchips, straw mulch, or landscaping fabric are the most effective methods of weed control. Do not cultivate deeply as it can damage the fibrous, shallow root system. Hand weed as needed until the plant's canopy develops.

PRUNING
Elderberries are a very fast growing, shrub-type plant with a "suckering" plant habit and can quickly become unruly without regular pruning. Pruning can be approached in a few ways. Most commonly, dead or weak stems are removed annually. This is generally done in the late winter/early spring (February to March) when plants are still dormant. Another effective pruning method is to trim stems back by about 1/3, essentially "topping" the plant uniformly all over. Lastly, if plants become unmanageable, cut all stems to the ground to completely rejuvenate. This method will not harm well-established plants.

DISEASES AND PESTS
Avoid planting near the edge of wooded areas to reduce bird damage and promote ample air circulation. Use bird netting to protect fruit. Elderberry plants are generally free of disease and insect pests. However, they may be susceptible to several pests and diseases, depending upon conditions; these include Japanese beetles, spotted wing drosophila (SWD), and *Verticillium* wilt. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office for more information.

HARVEST
Elderberries will bear a harvestable crop beginning in their 2nd year. In late summer, harvest whole clusters of berries by clipping them from the shrub. Use the fruit as soon as possible or refrigerate for later use. Strip the berries from the cluster before processing.

CAUTION!
Berries are toxic if eaten raw. They must be cooked prior to consumption. Elderberry fruits, leaves, stem, roots contain cyanic glucosides which can make people and livestock very ill if consumed raw. Elderberry flowers, however, are non-toxic and can be harvested and are commonly used.

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