



Elder



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Latin: *Sambucus nigra*

Irish: *Trom*

The Elder is a common shrub or small tree found in the countryside. It often grows on old refuse tips where it absorbs the extra nutrients in the soil.

Elders can grow to a height of 10 meters.

Common names: Boor Tree, Common Elder, European Elder, Pipe Tree, Black-berried Tree.

Description: Elder trees have wide heads and creamy coloured flowers. Clusters of deep red/black berries hang from the branches. These branches have a soft centre that can be easily removed. The hollow branches provide a safe nesting site for bumble bee larvae and shelter for hibernating insects. This hollowed branch can also be used to make homemade whistles and flutes.

History: The word 'elder' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word 'æld', meaning 'fire'. The Latin name 'Sambucus' comes from the Greek word 'Sambuca', which is an ancient musical instrument made from the elder wood.

Celtic link: The elder tree was thought to provide protection in Celtic times. It was believed to be good luck if an elder was growing near your home. Traditionally, the elder was grown at the back door to keep away evil spirits. People also used to leave food under elder trees the fairies.

Ogham: Ogham, the Celtic alphabet system, was based on trees. The Celts believed trees had different characteristics, emotions and magical or healing powers. The letters of this alphabet were linked to the names of trees.

The Ogham letter for the elder tree was 'R' (*ruis*).