



Sambucus mexicana Mexican Elder¹

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INTRODUCTION

Mexican Elder is a semi-evergreen small tree, reaching up to 30 feet in height (Fig. 1). Most open-grown specimens do not reach this height as they grow wider than tall. The light green, thick, leathery, pinnately compound leaves are often browsed by deer and livestock. The four to eight-inch-wide, flat cymes of yellow/white blooms appear mainly from April to June but in its native habitat may also occur at various times throughout the year after heavy rains. The small, blue/black fruits which follow the blooms are quite popular with birds and can be used to make wine or pies, and were reportedly even dried by Indians to be used at a later time. Fruits appear white because they are covered with a thick, waxy coating. A dye can be made from the stems and has been used to color baskets.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Sambucus mexicana*

Pronunciation: sam-BEW-kuss meck-sih-KAY-nuh

Common name(s): Mexican Elder

Family: *Caprifoliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 7B through 10 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

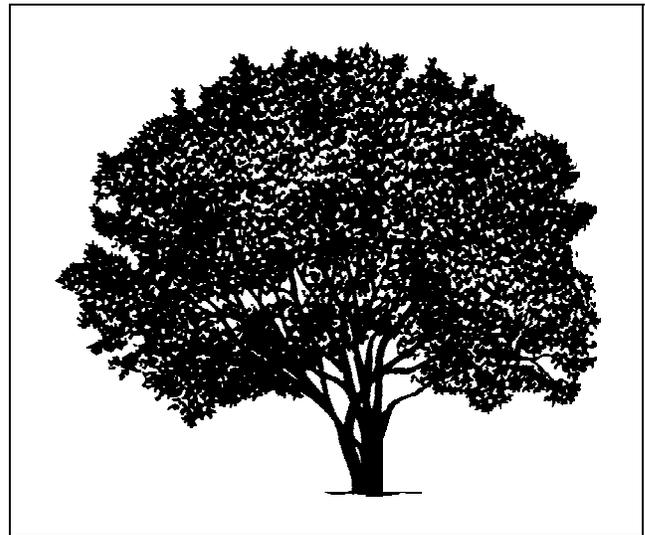


Figure 1. Mature Mexican Elder.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 25 feet

Spread: 25 to 35 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round; weeping

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
- Leaf type:** odd pinnately compound; trifoliate
- Leaflet margin:** serrate
- Leaflet shape:** elliptic (oval); ovate
- Leaflet venation:** pinnate
- Leaf type and persistence:** semievergreen
- Leaflet blade length:** 2 to 4 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** no fall color change
- Fall characteristic:** not showy

Flower

- Flower color:** white
- Flower characteristics:** showy; spring flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** round
- Fruit length:** < .5 inch
- Fruit covering:** fleshy
- Fruit color:** black; white
- Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; suited for human consumption; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant

litter; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; no thorns
- Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
- Breakage:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
- Current year twig color:** brown; green
- Current year twig thickness:** thick

Culture

- Light requirement:** tree grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained
- Drought tolerance:** high

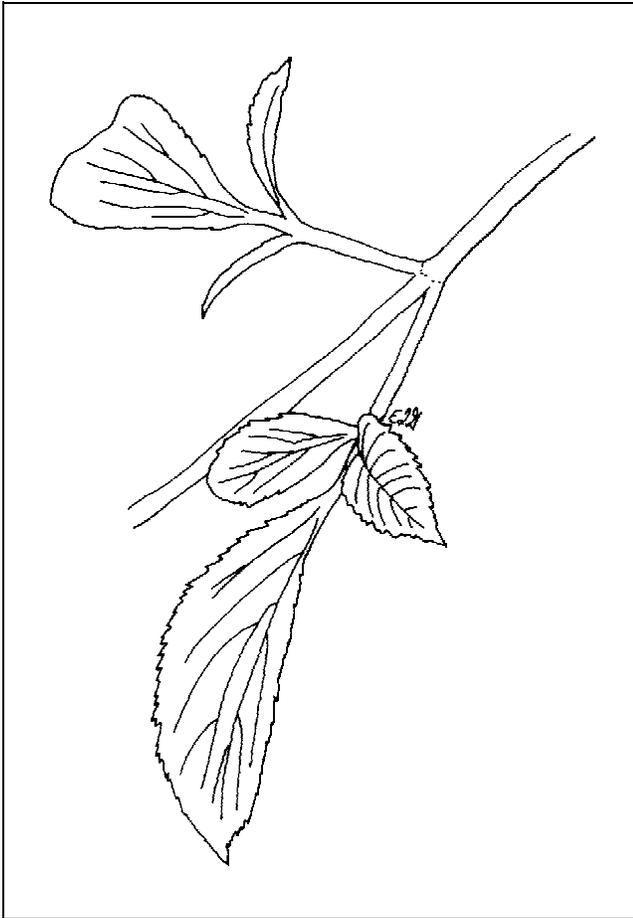


Figure 3. Foliage of Mexican Elder.

upright branches and remove the drooping ones to create greater clearance beneath the canopy.

Mexican Elder should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Ozone sensitivity: sensitive or moderately tolerant

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Trees are best located in the open where they can develop their low, wide-spreading, uniform crown. It might be planted near a patio, or as a small shade tree in a backyard garden but the dropping fruit can be messy on brick, concrete and other hard surfaces. Young trees often require training and pruning to speed formation of a uniform crown. Save the more