

# Sambucus nigra

## COMMON NAMES

elder, elderflower, elderberry

## BIOSTATUS

Exotic

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## FLOWER COLOURS

White

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Shrub or small tree to approx. 6m high. Stems grey, strongly lenticellate; vegetative shoots with thick white pith. Leaflets 5~7, dark purple when very young, soon green. Petiole to around 7cm long on flowering branches, mostly hairy. Petiolules hairy; lateral petiolules < 1cm long; terminal petiolule > 1cm long. Lamina of terminal leaflet 4.5~11 x 3.5~6cm, broad-elliptic to broad-ovate, glabrous, or hairy on veins beneath and on midrib above, serrate except towards base; apex acute to cuspidate. Lamina of lateral leaflets smaller and narrower. Infl. a large flat corymb, mostly 10~20cm across, glabrous or nearly so, with slender peduncles and pedicels which usu. become red or purple at fruiting, or occasionally remain green. Flowers foetid. Calyx .5mm long. Corolla white; lobes 2.5~3mm long, broad-elliptic. Stamens < corolla. Fruit 4~8.5mm diam., globose or subglobose, usu. shining black, occasionally green. Pyrenes approx. 3mm long, ovoid-oblong, rugose. (-Webb et. al., 1988)

## SIMILAR TAXA

Elder is a shrub or small tree (Porteus 1993).

## HABITAT

Terrestrial. A plant of coastal and lowland habitats (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant occurs in scrub and forest margin and modified plant communities (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

## GENUS

Sambucus

## FAMILY

Adoxaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Sambucus nigra* L.

## FLOWERING

November, December, January

## YEAR NATURALISED

1867

## ORIGIN

Eur, W Asia, N Africa



*Sambucus nigra*. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



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## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental

## TOLERANCES

The plant is intolerant of deep shade (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Requires medium to high soil fertility (Atkinson 1997).

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. Seed is produced (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seeds are 'short-lived' in the seed bank (Atkinson 1997). Seed is dispersed by birds (Timmins & MacKenzie, 1995; John Barkla, pers. comm.).

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

## POISONOUS PLANT

The black berries can cause stomach upsets if eaten raw.

## ETYMOLOGY

**nigra:** Black

## ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

**This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC.** 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

## NVS CODE

SAMNIG

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/sambucus-nigra/>

## PDF DATE

25 May 2026