

The First International Symposium on Elderberry
Columbia, MO USA, June 9-14, 2013

Organized under the auspices of the International Society for Horticultural Science and hosted by the University of Missouri, the First International Symposium on Elderberry attracted a wide variety of papers that will be published in a peer-reviewed, stand-alone volume of **Acta Horticulturae**. This volume's anticipated date of distribution depends on a number of factors, but the editors hope to make it available for purchase by the middle of 2014.

As someone who grows elderberry and distributes elderberry juice products, my engagement transcended the scope of the conference fairly well. My immediate purpose is to give you a few general observations about the symposium's content. My plan is to follow up with brief summaries of a number of the presentations that relate especially to consumers, health and nutrition professionals as well as potential growers.

That the researchers shared great enthusiasm for elderberry's potential benefits to the well being of humanity and animals was well evident. Most presenters mentioned or referenced how they consumed beverages and/or foods made from elder flowers and/or berries. More than a few elderberry beverages were shared freely in the evenings when the work was done for the day. Most of the research has been done using European black elderberry, *Sambucus nigra*, but some of the University of Missouri's research used the North American native-grown and processed elderberry juice from *S. (nigra) canadensis*, which relates directly to, and should encourage, the North American cultivation of elderberry.

Although a great deal of research – especially clinical studies – remains to be done, those who researched the potential health benefits of elderberry repeatedly summarized their research as supporting elderberry's traditional use as a densely nutritional herb that has imparted a number of observed health benefits to its consumers. These results indicated the strong antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties that elderberry's flavonoid antioxidants (anthocyanins, rutin, quercetin, etc.) have demonstrated in lab tests. Different research reports supported the use of black elderberry flowers and fruit for both prophylactic (take in advance to help prevent a condition) and in treatment of symptoms from the flu or other malady – often in conjunction with conventional western medical treatment. One in particular suggested that elderberry leaves had scientifically unexplored potential for healing as well.

The researchers differed over how much was good with an acknowledgement that too much produced a noticeable purging effect on human biology that should deliver the message of moderation. A number of presentations discussed the potential for elder flowers and fruits to provide both direct and indirect health benefits. Thus, compounds found in elder flowers and fruits can directly neutralize free radicals. The biological mechanisms involved in the indirect health benefits are more difficult to identify and prove, but in brief, elder flowers and fruit help the body's own immune / metabolic systems to respond to health threats present in its environment.

In summary, elder flowers and fruits provide a broad array of densely present nutrients that contribute to general health and enhance the body's ability to respond to health threats. Scientific research will take decades to explore these biological mysteries, but in the meantime the consumption of elderberry seems to do a body good. Just how good and in specifically what way, we will all need to wait and read about later as the scientists keep researching, presenting and publishing. Some suggested that we could look forward to a Second Symposium on Elderberry in 4-6 years.