**ELDER**

**Other names** : Ellern, Boretree, Boontree, Dog tree, and others  
**Origins** : Europe and western Asia  
**How to recognise it** : The smell of the leaves (of, usually, 5 pale-green leaflets) is unpleasant - compared by some to ‘mouse nests’! The flowers are profuse, cream-white, followed by bunches of fruits of almost black hue; the bark is pale grey-brown with long inter-linked grooves.  
**Limits of growth** : Max. height : 10m

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**Life of the tree** : Elder is so rarely given the chance to grow freely that it most frequently appears as a shrub in undergrowth or hedgerows. It indicates a rich soil and is often found on abandoned house sites or other places where manure may have accumulated. Young branches are hollow with a pith. Flowering is in June or July with the berries ripening through late August and September; the birds will usually eat them before the first frosts spoil them.

**Uses** : Elder is undergoing a re-vival as a distinctive and refreshing taste (derived from the young flower-heads) in a variety of drinks and foods; the flowers can also be eaten (raw or as fritters). Its berries make a fine red wine and the flower-heads a sparkling white one. There are a number of decorative garden varieties. The leaves were used to keep flies off cattle and, until Hawthorn largely replaced it, it was highly regarded as a quick growing hedge species. The pith has a specialised use for holding material whilst it is cut for microscope viewing. The heart wood and stumps are very hard indeed and prized for specialised turnery. Our ancestors associated a wide range of magical beliefs with the elder.

**Plant classification** : Magnoliidae (Dicotyledons)  
CAPRIFOLIACEAE Sambucus nigra L.