

Introduction

MANY YEARS AGO, after we had settled onto our first homestead, a friend came out to visit. As Ben and I walked around the property, he bent down here, or reached there, collecting what seemed to me to be nothing but weeds or bark or other scraps of plants and vegetation. Or he would point at some mass of tangled green growing things, mentioning a number of names that made no sense to me at the time, rattling off different ways they could be used as food or medicine.

Ben was a forager, someone intimately familiar with the benefits of the abundant plant life all around us, something that most of us—including our family at the time—completely missed. Queen Anne’s Lace and plantain. Wood sorrell and wild hickory (pig nut). Elderberry and acorns. Some are food. Some are medicine. Many are both.

If you are reading this book, then my hunch is you either already are into or are interested in learning more about such things—foraging, food as medicine, perennial plants with a rich culinary, craft, and medicinal history; creating a more sufficient farm or homestead, and much more. So, I want to start with a suggestion. Once you finish learning about elderberry, don’t stop! Elderberry is just one, albeit an exceptional one, of so many plants surrounding us that have innumerable benefits. Start with elderberry, but continue to learn, plant, forage, enrich, and explore long after.

The book follows a simple structure. It will start with just a brief survey of our long relationship with elder. We will cross time, cultures, and continents. Then, we will briefly look at elder's anatomy and terminology so that later in the book and out in the fields and forests, you better understand how to find and identify it. Next, we will talk about how to tend elderberry, from different ways to plant and propagate it to the most common diseases and pests that may afflict it. This naturally leads into a discussion on harvesting elderberries—both by foraging for them or from your own plantings. Since elderberries occur in abundance, knowing how to preserve the harvest comes immediately after. Last, we will look at the myriad ways elderberry can be used, both culinary and craft. By the end, I hope you will have a deeper appreciation for one of God's great gifts, the elder tree.

There was a great deal I couldn't fit into this introductory book, so if you want to learn more or connect, visit www.theelderberrybook.com