

Elder at the Autumn Equinox

The Autumn Equinox falls between 20th and 23rd September in the Northern Hemisphere. This is a time for taking stock, garnering our harvest, thanks-giving and pausing. All of the festival days on the old Celtic calendar are an invitation to pause, pay attention to what is actually happening within and all around, acknowledge community – of the human and the wider than human world within which our lives exist and depend upon, and to shower gratitude and appreciation for all that we have been given, including the moments in life that have tested us and enabled us to deepen, mature and surrender to something larger than our ideas about our selves and the world.



As we start to approach the colder, darker months, part of our Equinox reflections may relate to how to care for ourselves, loved ones and neighbours through the winter. The humble Elder Tree often found on the edges of fields, meadows or in hedgerows can greatly support our health and well-being through the winter months.

Many people are familiar with the white, lacy blossom of the Elder flower in summer, and make cordial or champagne with this summer bouquet. Less well known, and with very different characteristics is the Elder berry, which starts out green, then turns reddish then deep purple. The dark purple, slightly shiny, pee sized berry, can be foraged from September onwards.



My favourite way to honour the tree in autumn is to collect the berries and simply let them dry out on paper or a clean cloth on a flat surface. The drying process usually takes between 2-3 weeks (depending on weather conditions and room temperature).

When the berries are completely dry place them in a clean glass jar and store them for the winter. The berries aren't great to eat fresh from the tree, so drying them or mixing the fresh berry with another autumnal berry in a blender, either raspberry or blackcurrant, makes a tasty and vitamin packed drink.



These dark berries are rich in vitamins A and C, are antibacterial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and antiviral. These dark gems are known for soothing coughs, colds and sore throats, calming anxiety and soothing frayed nerves. A delicious syrup can be made with the berries, some grated fresh ginger and a teaspoon of honey. A simple tea can be made with 5-6 dried berries in boiling water. With my dried berries I like to add a teaspoon to my porridge in the mornings.

As with all foraging, ask permission from the tree before taking anything, if you get a 'yes' take a little from each tree leaving enough for other foragers, including our hollow boned relations who may have already beat you to the most juicy berries. If you get a 'no' thank the tree and move on. Give an offering to the tree in appreciation for what you have been given. This way the relationship between humans and the broader than human world is respected and we start to come back into a balanced relationship with our vaster body, of Earth.

Elder is known as the tree of Regeneration, it teaches us to honour cycles of regeneration. It is known as the Queen of the trees, the Witches tree. Pipes are made from Elder with its outer hard shell surrounding a softer inner pith which can be pushed out to create a hollow. Pipe music becomes a sound gateway to journeying. The Elder tree has always been respected and it is said there is an Elder Mother who lives in the tree. So... respect due. It's always a good idea to respect the Wise Woman of the land where you live and forage.

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