

# Could Elderberry Be Your Pet's Secret to Stronger Health?

While most berries can be safely enjoyed by pets in their whole form, this one needs to be properly processed into supplement form first. Discover the many advantages elderberry may offer for your companion animals.

Reviewed by [Dr. Tracy Duffner](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- When processed into a safe form, elderberries can boost your pet's immune function, reduce inflammation, support digestion, fight infections, ease respiratory issues, and improve skin and coat health naturally
- Never give raw, unripe elderberries to your pets as they contain cyanogenic glycosides that release toxic hydrogen cyanide when consumed
- Only use pet-specific elderberry supplements from trusted brands that are properly processed to eliminate toxins. It also needs to be clearly labeled for animals
- Always consult an integrative veterinarian before giving elderberry supplements to determine the appropriate dosage based on your pet's weight, age, and health status
- Elderberry supplements come as syrups, extracts, or specialized treats that can be mixed into food or given directly following the manufacturer's instructions

Berries like blueberries and blackberries are among the healthiest foods you can share with your pet — They are rich in fiber and an assortment of nutrients that support health in various ways. Not to mention, they also have an appealing taste. However, take note — not all "berries" can be safely consumed in their raw form. Elderberries are one example.

The fact is that raw, unripe elderberries (as well as the leaves, seeds, and stems of the plants) are not safe for humans or animals to consume. However, when properly processed and extracted, elderberries become a valuable supplement that can provide immense benefits for you and your furry companion.<sup>1</sup> Here is what you need to know when giving elderberry products to your pets.

## What Is Elderberry?

Elderberries come from the *Sambucus nigra* species,<sup>2</sup> which are known for their dark purple to black berries. They have been a staple in herbal medicine for centuries because they are rich in antioxidants and contain vitamins, such as vitamin C, and minerals such as potassium, calcium, iron, and trace amounts of iodine.<sup>3</sup> Elderberries are considered a rich source of both potassium and iron.<sup>4</sup> Here is an overview of the different benefits of this storied plant:<sup>5,6,7</sup>

- **Strengthens the immune system** — Elderberries contain potent antioxidants, including anthocyanins, rutin,<sup>8</sup> and vitamins A and C. These components work together to neutralize harmful free radicals that damage cells, thereby supporting your pet's immune health.

A notable flavanol molecule found in elderberries is quercetin, which is part of the rutin compound mentioned above.<sup>9</sup> According to Earth Buddy:<sup>10</sup>

*"This is another type of flavonoid found in elderberries, known for its antioxidant properties as well as its ability to help regulate inflammatory pathways. Quercetin is also known to help maintain normal histamine levels, support circulatory function, and support cognitive function."*

- **Reduces inflammation** — Pets, just like people, can suffer from inflammation due to arthritis, injuries, or allergies. This is where elderberry comes in — it contains natural anti-inflammatory properties that can ease symptoms associated with these conditions, such as swelling, redness, and pain.
- **Supports digestive health** — Optimal digestive health is essential for pets to ensure they absorb nutrients properly and maintain regularity. Elderberries can support healthy digestion through their dietary fiber, which protects the digestive tract from inflammation and oxidative stress. In addition, fiber promotes the growth of beneficial gut bacteria.
- **Fights infections** — Elderberry has strong antiviral and antibacterial properties that may help your pet fight various infections. This natural approach can reduce the frequency of antibiotic use, minimizing side effects and antibiotic-resistant complications.
- **Eases respiratory issues** — Pets often suffer from respiratory issues due to environmental factors, allergies, or seasonal changes. The antiviral properties of elderberries may help reduce symptoms like coughing, sneezing, and congestion, improving your pet's respiratory comfort.
- **Improves skin and coat health** — The antioxidants and vitamins present in elderberries may promote healthier skin and a shinier coat in pets. Reduced inflammation often results in fewer skin irritations, less itching, and overall better coat condition, making them an attractive option for pets prone to skin allergies or sensitivities.

## How to Safely Use Elderberries

While elderberries offer numerous health advantages, that does not mean you should go foraging for them outdoors whenever the opportunity arises. As mentioned in the beginning, certain precautions should be followed as they can cause life-threatening side effects:

- **Avoid wild elderberries** — Raw, unripe elderberries, along with their other plant parts, contain cyanogenic glycosides, which release hydrogen cyanide when consumed. This compound is toxic to dogs and cats, causing severe reactions which can be quickly fatal.<sup>11</sup> Always use pet-specific elderberry products that have been processed properly to eliminate these toxins.
- **Choose high-quality products** — There are many elderberry-centric supplements available for pets, but make sure to review them thoroughly because the quality varies widely.

To stay on the safe side, opt for trusted brands specifically formulated for pets. Supplements such as extracts and syrups should clearly state they are intended for animal use to ensure safety and effectiveness. Proper labeling and reputable sourcing significantly reduces the risk of harmful contaminants or improper dosage.<sup>12</sup>

- **Consult your integrative veterinarian** — Always do this before introducing any new supplement, including elderberry products, to your pet. Your veterinarian can help determine the appropriate dosage based on your pet's age, size, health status, and specific needs. Your veterinarian can even recommend brands or products that have proven effective in their practice.

## Elderberry Supplements Can Be Helpful, but Practice Caution

Proper dosage of elderberry supplements for pets will depend significantly on your pet's weight and overall health. So, again, consult with your veterinarian regarding this matter. As for typical methods of administration, common examples include:<sup>13</sup>

- **Syrups** — Elderberry syrup can usually be mixed directly into your pet's food or given orally with a dropper.
- **Extracts** — Elderberry extracts in liquid form or capsules are easy to incorporate into meals or homemade treats. As stated above, be sure to use a pet-specific brand as human elderberry extracts often contain additional spices such as cinnamon and cloves that may not be helpful for your pet.
- **Specialized pet treats** — Some holistic veterinary brands offer treats infused with elderberry compounds.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions and your veterinarian's recommendations closely to prevent overdose and to ensure maximum benefit.

## Elderberries in Pet Nutrition Research

Veterinary studies on the benefits of elderberries in animal wellness are few, but findings are promising. According to the research of Dr. Susan E. Orosz of the Bird & Exotic Pet Wellness Center in Toledo Ohio, elderberries can help support the health of ferrets:<sup>14</sup>

*"My clinical observation is that it helps to reduce the time and severity of clinical symptoms of upper respiratory infections in a variety of exotic animal patients ...*

*Elderberry also has anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties. In a periodontal study, aqueous extracts from the elder flower was found to potently inhibit proinflammatory activity when monocytes/macrophages or neutrophils were incubated with whole cells of *P gingivalis* and *A actinomycetemcomitans*, or purified components thereof. The anti-inflammatory extract was found to inhibit activation of the nuclear transcription factor kappa B and of phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase.*

*Another study found that elderberry extracts inhibited *H pylori*, compared with controls, and also increased susceptibility of *H pylori* to clarithromycin. Elderberry is commonly used in ferrets with viral respiratory disease and for those with *Helicobacter* as an adjunct to therapy."*

## Practice Safety First When Offering Elderberries

Elderberries, when used responsibly, can be a helpful addition to your pet's wellness regimen. They may offer immune support, relief from inflammation, improved digestive health, and increased respiratory comfort, all contributing to a healthier, happier pet.

However, remember to use elderberry supplements from trusted manufacturers, as well as under the supervision of your veterinarian — not the raw varieties. In addition, do not rely on elderberries as a singular source of antioxidants. They should be used as an adjunct to a species-appropriate diet, regular exercise, and routine veterinary care.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Dog Time, April 21, 2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NIH, Elderberry](#)

<sup>3,7</sup> [Holistic Care for Animals by Taranet, How Elderberry Can Help Your Animal](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NutritionValue.org, Elderberries, raw](#)

<sup>5,10,11,13</sup> [Earth Buddy, May 12, 2023](#)

<sup>6,12</sup> [Clear Max, Elderberry: Immune Supporter for Beloved Pets](#)

<sup>8</sup> [EXCLI J. 2015 Jan 9;14:59–63](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Front. Microbiol., 21 December 2020 Sec. Microbial Symbioses Volume 11 – 2020](#)

<sup>14</sup> [NAVC Conference 2011, Alternative Medicine for Ferrets](#)

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