

The sight of it caught me by surprise, especially where I saw it growing, but more about that later. Having spotted it, I immediately began reflecting on my early teenage years.

My father passed away when I was 14 years old. At the time of his death, our family lived on a farm a few miles south of Sutton, NE. Within a year or two after my dad's death, mother and we kids moved to town. Meandering through the heart of Sutton is School Creek. This alluring little stream bordered our backyard making it a perfect venue for a young boy's curiosity. How fondly I recall exploring and playing with my friends on the banks of that creek bottom. Some of my greatest memories as a young teenager were created there.

It grows wild throughout most of North America. The plant prefers growing in full sun and does best in moist, fertile, well-drained soil with a pH range of 5.5 to 6.5. Because of its preference for acidic soil, I was very surprised to see it flourishing in Minden and even more surprised at the location where I found it growing. Long ago in Sutton, on the banks of School Creek, I first discovered this beautiful flowering shrub with its edible fruit.

This deciduous shrub, a member of the honeysuckle family, is capable of reaching heights of 10 to 12 feet. In the spring, this plant produces small, flattened, white flowers that grow into large umbrella-shaped clusters measuring twelve to fifteen inches in diameter. By late summer, the white flowers transform into dark purple berries forming drooping clusters. The berries contain large quantities of vitamins A and B and some say are credited with having high cancer-fighting antioxidants. The ripe berries are especially tasty when used in jellies and jams. After I harvested the berries, Mother would frequently make them into jelly. To this day, this particular jelly remains one of my favorites. Although



we never turned the berries into wine, I can personally attest that they do create a tasty beverage. If humans do not utilize the berries, I know the birds will love them.

Have I kept you in suspense long enough? Okay, the plant I am writing about is *Sambucus canadensis*, commonly called wild elderberry.



Although both the flowers and berries of this wild plant are edible, one should know that other parts of this bush are poisonous and contain toxic calcium oxalate crystals. Furthermore, to some individuals, elderberry plants look like a few different plants, some of which are extremely poisonous. To the untrained eye, elderberry can often be confused with pokeberry or even poison hemlock. What separates elderberry from some other look-alikes is bark. Elderberry is a woody plant and has warty, textured bark. For those not interested in dealing with wild elderberry plants, one can purchase a number of domesticated varieties from nurseries and

through mail-order catalogs.

By the way, I have attached photos of the elderberry flowers that recently caught my attention. These beautiful blooming elderberries are located in one of Minden's parks nestled in a planting of lilacs. If left untouched, in a month or so, these beautiful flowers will have turned into dark purple, edible berries. If



I can beat the birds to them, I am seriously thinking about harvesting some of them. Perhaps Rita and I could try making elderberry jelly. Even if we are not successful, I am reasonably sure Mother would have been proud of us for trying.