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# HORTICULTURE NEWS

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## Native Edible shrubs are making a comeback

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We often forget that some of the most useful plants simply grow out in the wild all around us. Many native shrubs produce berries that are edible and useful in many ways and their importance is being re-discovered by many. Here are two native shrubs you might be interested in. They each provide value to us as well as the wildlife that depend on them for food and shelter.

### Elderberries

Elderberries are perhaps one of the most useful native plants around. Long ago these shrubs were a staple in most farmstead operations due to their many uses and benefits.

The American elderberry is a deciduous shrub which grows in Kansas and ranges from 5 to 12' tall and is usually found around stream banks, woodlands, thickets, and even along roadsides. The plants is easy to identify due to its large flat topped clusters of small white flowers that appear in spring that are then followed by clusters of dark, berry-like fruits that mature into late summer and fall (often September).

The berries can be consumed when directly when ripe, but it is recommended to cook them to avoid any ill effects. Cooking also improves the taste. The fruit can be used in many ways including in jellies, pies, and wine. Elderberries also have a long history of being used in the treatment of human ailments and are said to be beneficial and stimulating to the immune system. Elderberries are high in vitamins A and B, and contain significant amounts of vitamin C and amino-acids.

Believe it or not, elderberries have also made their way into the landscape. A popular variety called 'Black Lace' is stunning in the landscape. It has intense purple/black foliage with creamy pink flowers in the spring that contrast beautifully with the dark leaves. The berries are also edible on this variety. This might be just the plant for those wanting a beautiful landscape shrub that is also edible.

### Native plums

There are two plums that are native to Kansas. *Prunus Americana*, American plum and *prunus angustifolia*, sand hill plum are both found across the state. Both types form thickets and spread from root suckers.

*Sand hill plum* grows to a height of around 4-5 feet while the American plum grows up to 10-12 feet. Both shrubs have historically been used in windbreaks, for wildlife areas, and for erosion control. The thorny thicket of the American plum is valuable for songbird and gamebird nesting and roosting. Various other

animals also use these thickets for, bedding and as escape cover. The fruit is eaten by numerous birds and other animals.

Both shrubs flower in the spring and set fruit which ripens throughout the summer. The fruit is ripe anytime between late July and September and can be used in jellies, wine, pies and preserves.

There may not be quite as many landscape uses for a native plum, but it is still a valuable plant for human and animal alike. If you are interested the Kansas Forest Service offers native elderberry and plum shrubs for sale as seedlings during its conservation tree sales. You can find more information at <https://www.kansasforests.org>