



Blueberry Variety Review

Courtney Weber, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture
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The most critical aspect of establishing a healthy berry planting is obtaining high quality planting stock that has a vigorous root system and is free from disease and insect pests. The plants should be obtained from a reputable nursery that participates in a certification program to ensure plants are free from diseases such as viruses and root diseases. Mother plants or stock plants derived from tissue culture for starting propagation fields provide the best source of disease and pest free plants. Plants should be ordered well in advance of planting to ensure an adequate supply the desired varieties and plant sizes.

Blueberry nursery plants come in a variety of types (bare root, container grown, tissue culture) and sizes (rooted cuttings, tissue culture plugs, and 2-3 year old plants). Larger plants will mature and produce a crop sooner than smaller plants. Container grown plants may have some advantage to bare root plants, especially if planting is delayed in the spring because they withstand temperature and moisture fluctuations better. However, shipping of containerized plants is more expensive and they may require root pruning if they are root bound when they arrive.

Several characteristics should be considered when selecting varieties including harvest season, yield, fruit quality, hardiness, growth habit, vigor, and disease resistance. The plants go dormant in late fall and over winter in the field. Storing capacity varies greatly among varieties but is considerably higher for blueberries than most other berries. The market has also shifted towards larger fruit for various reasons including greater consumer appeal and increased harvest efficiency, but there is a good market for small "wild type" blueberries from low bush types. Most of the processing market is machine-harvested fruit and some fresh market fruit is sorted from machine harvested lots as well.

Variety Descriptions

Early Season

Bluetta is very hardy but has small dark berries that are difficult to machine harvest and somewhat unattractive in the fresh pack. The large scar on the berry is also a problem. This variety has a weak growth habit and must be pruned carefully to maintain vigor and yield. Winter hardy to -35°C.

Duke is considered the best early season cultivar available. It has late bloom that avoids many frosts and still produces an early crop. The fruit size and quality is very good but the flavor can be bland if

picked late. It can be machine harvested. Frost tolerance and winter hardiness is good. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Hannah's Choice produces medium large fruit with high sugar content. The fruit is firmer with better flavor than Duke. Yields are moderate.

Spartan fruit is firm and very large with very good flavor. A late bloom date avoids many frosts, but it still produces a large, early crop. It does best on ideal sites but performs poorly in soils that have to be highly amended for blueberries. It harvests well mechanically and has some resistance to mummy berry. It requires cross pollination for best yields. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Mid-Season

Berkley berries are light blue, firm and very large with very good storage capacity. Fruit flavor is fair. Winter hardiness is moderate. The bush is moderately tall and spreading and suitable for machine harvesting. Care should be taken in pruning to maintain bush shape. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Bluecrop is the most widely planted mid-season cultivar in the world. It produces high yields of medium sized, firm fruit with good flavor. It is hardy in all but the coldest sites and can be machine harvested. The canes tend to be weepy so care should be taken to maintain the shape. It has very good disease resistance. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Bluejay has an upright open growth habit that grows rapidly. It produces moderate crops of medium sized, high quality fruit that can be machine harvested and ships well. It is resistant to some viral diseases and moderately resistant to mummy berry. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Blueray is also a widely planted mid-season cultivar. Fruit size is very good with good flavor and high yield potential. Extra pruning is needed with this spreading bush, as canes tend to weep due to heavy bearing. It has very good winter hardiness. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Cara's Choice produces medium sized fruit with 30% more sugar than Duke and Bluecrop. The fruit can hold on the plant for an extended period before harvest. The bush is low to moderate in vigor. Yields are moderate compared to Bluecrop.

Chippewa is a very winter hardy half-high variety that is productive with large firm fruit. Winter hardy to -35°C.

Draper produces a concentrated harvest between Duke and Bluecrop that can be machine harvested, even for fresh market. The flavor is very good with good hardiness.

Northland is very winter hardy. It is an extremely productive half-high type with medium sized, dark, soft fruit. It can reach 1.25 m tall and produces many canes, which require heavy annual pruning. Winter hardy to -35°C.

Patriot is winter hardy but frost sensitive due to early bloom. The fruit is large and firm with a small blossom scar. Full ripeness is needed for good flavor and sweetness. The bush is small to medium and grows slowly but is still productive. It must be pruned hard for large fruit and be fully ripe for best flavor. Suspected susceptibility to tomato ringspot virus has limited its use in recent years, but it is more tolerant to heavier soils than most varieties. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Sierra is productive and has large firm berries that can be machine harvested. It has a medium sized bush and is less hardy than other cultivars. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Toro is a productive cultivar with large fruit that ripen uniformly. The clusters tend to be tight which makes picking harder. The canes tend to be too upright and thick. Competes with Bluecrop, which may be somewhat better in quality. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Rubel is a wild selection that can be grown for the natural foods market. The fruit is small, firm and dark like low bush varieties. The flavor is fair and yields are moderate. It has very good winter hardiness. Winter hardy to -35°C.

Late Season

Aurora is the latest variety available, producing 5 days after Elliot. The fruit is very firm and stores well. It colors early and can be tart if picked too soon. The fruit size is large with very good yield.

Bluegold produces medium sized berries with small, dry blossom scars. It has good flavor and firmness. It is a low growing bush with many branches and very good hardiness. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Brigitta produces large, firm, flavorful fruit that stores well. It is vigorous but can be less hardy because it grows late into the fall. Excess nitrogen will make this worse. It is susceptible to Phomopsis. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Chandler produces very large berries with good flavor. It has a long ripening season over 6 weeks, which is better for hand harvesting. The bush is vigorous with a slightly spreading habit that can reach 1.5 to 2 m high. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Elliott is a very late season berry with very good shelf life, 30-45 days in a modified atmosphere. The fruit is large and firm but can be tart because it turns blue before ripe. It is a good producer. The bush has an upright habit and forms a dense center that should be pruned to promote air movement. Winter hardy to -25°C.

Jersey is an old (1928) cultivar that is adapted to a wide soil range. It has high yields of machine harvested fruit but the berries are small and soft. The bush has an upright habit and forms a dense center that should be pruned to promote air movement. Winter hardy to -35°C.

Liberty produces fruit approximately 5 days before Elliot with better flavor. The plants are vigorous and upright with good hardiness. The fruit has very good storage capacity.

Nelson is productive with firm, attractive, good flavored that can be machine harvested. The fruit can hang on the bush for extended periods. It is a vigorous, hardy bush with wide soil adaptation. Winter hardy to -25°C.

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