

Recommended Highbush Blueberry Varieties for Nova Scotia

Introduction

The varieties included in the following list are recommended varieties of highbush blueberries for the Valley and milder areas in Southwest Nova Scotia. In Central and Eastern Nova Scotia there is still no proven commercial highbush blueberry production due to low winter minimum temperatures. Northland is recommended for growers wishing to trial highbush blueberries in those areas, due to its higher winter hardiness rating.

This list is not inclusive of all available varieties.

Varieties are listed in order of ripening.

Duke: Early season

Fruit: Large berry, medium blue, open cluster, small scar, firm, mild-crisp flavour

Bush: Very strong, upright-open growth, vigorous; height 1.2 – 1.5 m (4-5 ft.)

Hardiness: Moderate to hardy

Duke (*pictured top and middle at right*) is at present the most popular variety for new plantings because of its heavy production, high quality, and even sized fruit. It has a mild and crisp flavour which improves with cold storage. This is one of the most productive varieties grown. The open, upright growth habit makes for efficient pruning. Duke blooms late but ripens early protecting blossoms from frost. It is generally harvested in two main picks and this concentrated ripening makes it an excellent variety for machine harvesting. The fruit is very firm and has excellent shelf life which makes it very suitable for long distance shipping for fresh market. It is also equally suitable for “individual quick freeze” (IQF) and processing markets. Finally, it is known to be resistant to mummy berry disease.

Spartan (*pictured at lower right*): Early season

Fruit: Large berry, light blue, medium sized scar, firm

Bush: Upright-open growth; height 1.5 – 1.8 m (5-6 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy



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Spartan usually blooms late, but ripens early, thus avoiding frost injury. The fruit have excellent to superb flavour and can reach large sizes – sometimes up to the size of a quarter. This variety requires a light, well-drained soil. Primary uses in the market place include u-pick or commercial harvesting. It is moderately resistant to mummy berry disease.

Northland: Early midseason

Fruit: Medium-size berry, medium blue, medium-sized scar, soft. fruit

Bush: Spreading growth, vigorous; height 1.2 – 2.1 m (4-7 ft.)

Hardiness: Very hardy

Northland is known for its hardiness and high yields; however, it requires heavy annual pruning. It is easy to grow and is adaptable to many different soil types. The flexible branches of Northland tend to bend under heavy snow loads. The primary use for this variety is for processing or local farm markets as it tends to have a sweet flavour. Northland is susceptible to mummy berry disease. Recommended for Central and Eastern Nova Scotia.

Bluejay: Early midseason

Fruit: Medium berry, light blue, small-dry scar, very firm, crunchy, mild flavour

Bush: Vigorous, strong, upright-open growth, slightly spreading; height 1.5 – 2.1 m (5-7 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

Introduced in 1978, Bluejay (*pictured below*) is an easy to establish variety that is the most suitable for mechanical harvesting of varieties listed in this document. The fruit is at the periphery of the plant, is very firm and resists cracking. It does not drop quickly, hanging for long periods of time, and once ripe retains its quality making it good for shipping. The bush grows rapidly and is partially resistant to both phases of mummy berry disease. Production is excellent if protected from frost during bloom. This variety is also good for u-pick markets.



Bluecrop: Midseason

Fruit: Medium to large berry, light blue, small scar, very firm, good flavour (although tart)

Bush: Vigorous, upright-open growth, very productive; height 1.2 – 1.8 m (4-6 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

Released in 1952, Bluecrop (*pictured above*) is the most widely grown variety in the world. It has excellent fruit quality for both fresh and processing markets. Berries are resistant to cracking and dropping. The variety is easy to establish and has very few problems. Fruit can be tart or show “red back” if picked too early. Plants tend to overproduce unless carefully pruned each year. Overproduction will lead to floppy canes and berries lying on the ground. This variety needs to be trellised for machine harvesting. Moderate resistance to mummy berry disease.

Bluegold: Late midseason

Fruit: Medium berry, light blue, small-dry scar, firm, tart flavour

Bush: Low and bushy growth; height 1.2 – 1.5 m (4-5 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

Bluegold was released in 1990 and generally has high production of high quality fruit that ripen around the same time (concentrated ripening). This variety does have a tendency for berry drop in Nova Scotia without timely picking. Bluegold is an excellent berry for commercial fresh market sales and local farm markets as it has good shelf life. It can also be used for u-pick or the processing industry. This variety is susceptible to mummy berry disease.

Nelson: Late midseason

Fruit: Large berry, light blue, small-dry scar, firm, flavourful

Bush: Vigorous, upright-open growth, productive; height 1.5 – 1.8 m (5-6 ft)

Hardiness: Very hardy

Nelson is a good choice for growers who need excellent quality fruit with exceptional flavour; however, fluctuating dry and wet weather conditions are known to promote berry splitting in this variety. The fruit is similar to Spartan and has excellent flavour. It is an ideal variety for late season fresh market and is equally good for processing and IQF. It was selected from crosses of Bluecrop and Berkeley, and yields consistently and quite high.

The primary use of Nelson in commercial production is as a superior pollinator.

Bonus: Late midseason

Fruit: Very large berry, medium blue, medium scar, firm, good flavour

Bush: Vigorous, upright-open growth; height 1.5 – 1.8 m (5-6 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

Bonus is a new variety and is known to have excellent productivity of exceptionally large fruit with good flavour. Bonus blueberries are about the size of a quarter making them one of the largest blueberries on the market today. Used for the fresh market or u-pick operations.

Burlington: Late season

Fruit: Medium berry, medium blue, small scar, firm, good flavour

Bush: Vigorous, upright-spreading growth, easy to grow; height 2.1 – 2.4 m (7-8 ft.)

Hardiness: Very hardy

Burlington is a very productive variety that was introduced in 1939. It lasts about a week longer than Jersey and is resistant to cracking. It is liked for its excellent winter hardiness, fine scar and good storability. One drawback of this variety is its smallish berry. There is potential to capture the niche late season export markets which offer a price premium, justifying the high cost of picking the small berries. It is one of the tallest blueberry selections, growing 7-8 feet tall. If not pruned properly, this plant can go into biennial production. It is resistant to mummy berry disease.

Elliott: Late season

Fruit: Medium to large berry, light blue, firm, small scar, tart flavour

Bush: Upright, vigorous; height 1.2 – 1.8 m (4-6 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

Elliott is of moderate to high vigor and needs hard, detailed pruning for good fruit quality and to avoid very late ripening. The berry can be quite tangy unless picked fully ripe. It is also susceptible to cracking and softening. Elliott's late bloom period avoids most spring frosts and the typically heavy bud set requires extra pruning, but the bountiful crops of larger fruit are worth the effort.

Trial Varieties in Nova Scotia

Draper: Midseason

Fruit: Medium to very large (size variable) berry, light blue, firm, small scar, crisp texture, mild flavor

Bush: Round and stocky growth; height 0.9 – 1.2 m (3-4 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

NEW! Draper has concentrated ripening in early to mid- season. It yields large berries that are super easy and quick to pick. They store extremely well. Young plants may produce many whips and require more pruning. Machine harvestable. Fruit can be "stemmy" (berry stem stays on plant), particularly when machine harvested. In some northern production regions, Draper has been known to experience premature fruit drop.

Liberty: Late season

Fruit: Medium to large berry, bright blue, slightly flat, firm, small scar, very good flavor

Bush: Vigorous, upright but requires trellis

Hardiness: Hardy

NEW! Liberty produces distinctly flavored berries that pick easily and ripen late. Liberty is adaptable, grows vigorously and has high yield potential. It has shown potential as a large-scale commercial variety but variable performance and fruit quality in warm weather are concerns. The berries can soften under high temperature. It can be more time consuming to prune than many other cultivars. Sections of plants can produce small (shot) berries. It is known to be susceptible to cane diseases in northern production regions.

Legacy: Late midseason

Fruit: Medium to large berry, light to medium blue, firm, small scar, good flavor

Bush: Vigorous, open, spreading; height 1.2 – 1.8 m (4-6 ft.)

Hardiness: Moderate to hardy

NEW! Legacy is known both as a vigorous grower and heavy producer. With a robust flavour, it was rated as one of the best flavored varieties in USDA trials. It has a long fruiting season, however the prolonged bloom period leads to early flowers that are sensitive to frost in cooler regions. New growth originates from higher on bush; prune accordingly in late winter. This cultivar seems to adapt to most soils and cold to moderate climates but keep in mind the potential for frost damage.

Aurora: Late season

Fruit: Medium to large berry, dark blue, firm, small scar, mild flavor

Bush: Moderate vigor, stocky, spreading growth habit, especially when young round and upright; height 1.5 – 1.8 m (5-6 ft.)

Hardiness: Hardy

NEW! Aurora is the latest variety available, producing 5 days after Elliot, and extending picking well into September. It is extremely productive and may require three to four pickings. Aurora may be selected over Elliott due to its improved flavor and large berry size. Needs hard and detailed pruning for good fruit quality and to avoid very late ripening fruit in regions with a shorter growing season. The fruit is very firm and stores well, however it does need to hang on the plant to fully ripen and sweeten. Some of the notable features are ease of picking the ripe fruit, concentrated ripening, post-harvest colour retention and extended shelf-life. Similar to Burlington, there is potential to capture the niche late season export markets which offer a price premium.

**Availability and varieties will depend on local supplies. For additional varietal information contact your local supplier.*

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