Northblue and Northsky Blueberries

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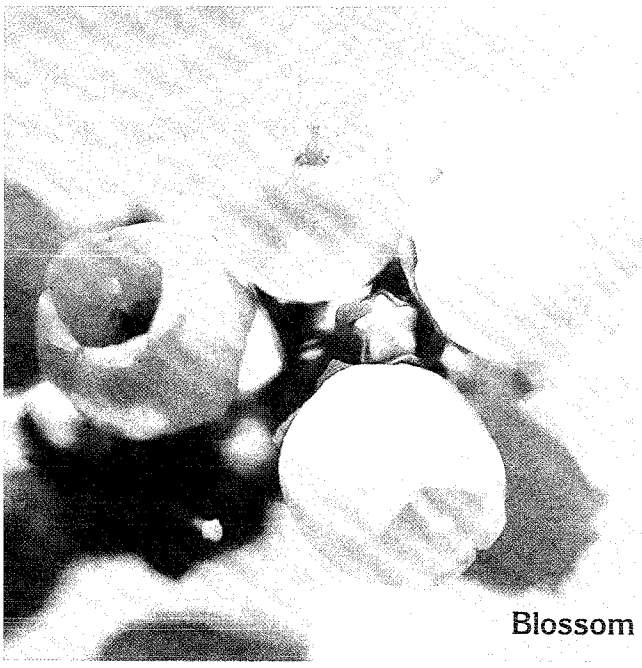
Fall Color



Blossom

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Northblue
MN 360 (B10 x US3)

Northblue is a half-high blueberry being introduced from the University of Minnesota fruit breeding program. The low-statured plant produces large, attractive, dark blue fruit. This cultivar offers Minnesota growers and gardeners their first reliably productive blueberry cultivar.

Northblue fruit has a good blueberry flavor when eaten fresh and a processed flavor which is superior to popular highbush cultivars. The fruit is firm and stores well with refrigeration. Plants are productive; annual harvests of between 3 and 7 pounds of fruit per plant are possible.

The plants themselves are short-statured, growing to a height of 20 to 25 inches. Growth is vigorous during the summer, and the large, glossy, dark green leaves turn dark red in the fall. Plants of Northblue have survived winter temperatures of –30°F to –35°F, although production is maximized when snow protection is adequate.

This cultivar was selected in 1973 from a cross made in 1968. The maternal parent, B10, was selected in 1967 from a progeny of G 65 x Ashworth (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) seedlings grown with natural winter selection pressure at Excelsior, Minnesota, since 1954. The paternal parent, US3, is a *V. corymbosum* selection from the USDA blueberry program.

Northblue is suggested for use as a commercial pick-your-own or home garden cultivar for northern regions of the United States and Canada where the productivity of normal highbush cultivars is poor due to cold winter temperatures and inadequate winter protection.

Northsky
MN 332 (B6 x R2P4)

Northsky is a half-high blueberry being introduced from the University of Minnesota fruit breeding program.

The fruit is medium size and has a dusty bloom that gives it a very attractive sky blue color. Northsky fruit has a good blueberry flavor when eaten fresh and the processed flavor is superior to popular highbush cultivars. The fruit stores well with refrigeration. Plants are moderately productive, yielding between 1 and 2 pounds of fruit.

Northsky plants are short-statured, growing to a height of 10 to 18 inches. Plants are dense, with glossy dark green summer foliage that turns dark red in the fall. Plants of Northsky have survived –35°F to –40°F during the winter but are most productive when adequate snow protection is available.

This cultivar was selected in 1973 from a cross made in 1968. The maternal parent, B6, was selected in 1967 from a progeny of G 65 x Ashworth (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) seedlings that had been growing under natural winter selection pressure at Excelsior, Minnesota, since 1954. The paternal parent, R2P4, was selected from a population of open-pollinated seedlings derived from fruit of half-high blueberry plants collected in the Harvard Forest. These seedlings were grown without winter protection for several years at Grand Rapids, Minnesota. R2P4 was selected because of its low stature and resistance to winter injury.

Northsky is suggested for use as a home garden cultivar for northern regions with severe cold but abundant snow cover.

Northblue has greater potential than Northsky for commercial pick-your-own operations due to larger fruit size and greater productivity. Both cultivars make ideal home landscape plants. Northblue and Northsky are available through Minnesota nurseries

General Blueberry Culture Notes

Blueberry plants grow best in full sun. Since the root system is fibrous and shallow, a uniform moisture supply, including irrigation during dry periods, is required. Organic soils and light, well-drained soils are preferred while heavy, poorly drained soils should be avoided.

The most critical factor in successful blueberry growth is the soil pH. A soil pH of from 4.5 to 5.5 is considered best. If the soil pH is higher than 5.8 growth and development of the blueberry plant is likely to be reduced and foliage may turn yellow; plants will die if the pH remains too high for an extended period. The pH of the soil should be determined from a soil test before planting. When the pH is over 5.8 the existing soil should be replaced or mixed with acid peat.

Mulching with acid peat, wood chips, sawdust, pine needles or straw to a depth of 3 to 5 inches is beneficial for controlling weeds, retaining moisture, adding organic matter and preventing root damage from cultivation. When a sawdust mulch is used, fertilizer is needed to replace nitrogen used during decomposition of the sawdust.

Acid-forming fertilizers such as ammonium sulfate should be applied to maintain soil acidity and supply nutrients. An application rate of two ounces of ammonium sulfate per plant for young plants is suggested. This rate can increase to four ounces on older, established plants. Apply the fertilizer on top of the ground within the dripline of the plant in the early spring as the buds break.

The special mixtures of fertilizer found at most garden centers for use with azaleas and rhododendrons will also work for blueberries. Fertilizers that contain nitrogen in the nitrate form or potassium in the chloride form are sometimes toxic to blueberry plants and should be avoided.

Some form of winter protection for shoots and flower buds is necessary for optimum productivity since temperatures from –25°F to –30°F may cause damage. Natural snow offers the easiest and best protection. Covering plants with snow or mulching them with straw, hay or leaves can help to reduce winter injury and improve fruit production. Avoid cultural practices that contribute to late season growth.

Regular pruning of young plants is not essential, although dead and broken branches should be removed. If branching is not abundant in young plants, the longest stems may be cut back by one-third in the early spring. After the plant begins fruiting, thick dense growth should be pruned by thinning out the oldest stems to ground level or to a strong side shoot.

Blueberries have few insect and disease problems. With good sanitation the plantings should remain healthy. Birds need to be controlled during the fruit-ripening period. Protection from rabbits and deer also may be necessary where they are a problem.

Although a single plant will produce fruit, per-plant yields will be higher if more than one cultivar is planted.