
Your Essential Honeyberry Guide

Simple ideas on establishing a healthy
and productive orchard



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Preface

Why it's not just another berry?

We firmly believe whether you say Haskap or we say Honeyberry. This emerging fruit is not just any ordinary berry, far from it. It has a tremendous future ahead of it. If you have not yet tasted the berries, we believe you will be amazed at its delicious and complex flavour and be surprised that you have never heard of it before.



We love a Dutch scientist's insightful quote following his trip to the Russian Institute of Horticulture: "I do not know why Russians are engaging in breeding any other crops for which they have lagged behind for decades when they have such a miracle."

Many North American and European observers suggest this miracle is one of the world's tastiest and colourful secrets. It presents passionate growers who 'farm like

Honeyberries Many Shapes



winemakers' endless profitable opportunities in a world that is 'berry mad' for smoothies and becoming more passionate by the day regarding food health and how food is grown and made. So what's the catch?

We do not believe there is one, apart from its 'new'. Farmers or fruit growers tend to be a conservative group compared to their winemaking cousins. So the key catch or obstacle as in any business, once you have made your exciting new gadget or in this case grown your perfect berry, is 'who is going to buy it?' This is why the winemakers who grow bottles of wine rather than grapes have the 'story' advantage to making money. They tend to know why their customers are their customers.

Once you have created or crafted your own orchard 'story.' You will be able to take advantage of the long list of Honeyberry or if your story demands it Haskap advantages.

-
- Easy to grow organically and locally in healthy and balanced soil (ideal pH 6.4)
 - Global products have commercially proven it as a premium fruit
 - Achieves the Holy Grail in fruit, as it makes a range of world class alcohol (High tannins and Brix of 20 plus)
 - Low orchard running costs and plant is very cold and frost hardy
 - Harvest mechanically and no annual pruning or trellising needed
 - Attractive yields per acre of 8,000 to 12,000 pounds (1,000 plants per acre)
 - Low global supply and premium pricing (\$2.50 to \$5.00 per pound)
 - Berries are suitable for fresh, frozen and process markets
 - Very healthy and nutritious - high antioxidants and mineral content
 - Unique taste, colour and kids love them!

It is important to return to this idea of 'story', every single company knows WHAT they do, however, only the successful ones can articulate WHY they do WHAT they do. When we say, WHY we do not mean to make money, that is simply the result. By WHY, we mean what is your 'story's' purpose, cause or belief? WHY does your Honeyberry dream exist? WHY do you get out of bed every morning to work in the orchard?

Most businesses or growers act or communicate with their customers, from the outside in. They say WHAT they do, sometimes say HOW they do it, but they rarely say WHY they do WHAT they do. Today's consumers are no longer interested in buying WHAT you do; they buy WHY you do it. This is the reason why consumers perceive Apple as being authentic. Everything they do works to demonstrate their WHY, '*to challenge the status quo and to empower the individual*'. Regardless of the products they make or the industry in which they generate it is clear that Apple 'thinks differently.'

We believe there are no secrets when establishing a Honeyberry orchard or Russian miracle. The combination of climate, people, and terroir make a quality of fruit that is perfectly unique and impossible to reproduce. Exceptional Honeyberries—whether fresh, frozen, or simply jam—is about a place, but without your efforts and planning no any future orchard will remain a hillside or meadow covered with weeds, grass, and a few wildflowers.

There is always some 'magic' in the way the finest orchards or vineyards are farmed and loved. However, this magic is akin to removing the tarnish off a silver chalice rather than building the chalice itself. So we wish you luck with your Honeyberry dreams and crafting your 'story.' Please enjoy our guide, put it to good use, and we encourage you to think differently and farm like a winemaker. As you may recall, Canola was just a good idea 30 years ago.

Orchards are not made by singing 'Oh, how beautiful,' and sitting it the shade.



1. Introduction

Honeyberry - From Russia with Love

We would like to introduce you to a new idea, it's called a Honeyberry and its from 'Russia with Love.' It is considered to be one of the world's tastiest secrets. To do this properly, we need to take you back to 1996 to the starting article that put forward the thought that the Honeyberry (at that time it was called Blue Honeysuckle) - a berry from Russia could become an important commercial crop in North America.

It's a wonderful introduction and starting point to show the great strides that have been made by North American plant growers like Maxine Thompson, Jim Gilbert, Dr. Bob Bors and Lidia Delafield. Together they have continued to improve Honeyberry varieties to increase commercially harvestable yields to over 10 pounds per plant, lengthen the harvesting season, increased berry size, and most importantly enhance its taste and flavour. Also, the plant has shown its self to be far more adaptable to warmer temperate growing regions.

We believe that the hard graft of the last twenty years is just now starting to produce some cracking new varieties, which can thrive over a far larger footprint than was originally thought. It may have taken 20 years to take root, but we firmly believe that this berry can thrive outside its native region and is set to become a major commercial crop in North America and Europe over the next 20 years.

The article below is by Dr. Maria N. Plekhanova and is excerpted below as it originally appeared as "Blue Honeysuckle: A New Berry From Russia" in Pomona 29(1), Winter 1996, 46-48, published by the North American Fruit Explorers. An edited version appeared in the March, 1998 issue of the Global Newsletter on Underutilised Crops.

"Blue Honeysuckle - A New Berry From Russia"

Sweet blue honeysuckle, a new berry plant, has currently gained wide popularity with gardeners in the Russian north, in the zone of risky horticulture. Practically in any amateur's or farmer's garden, from three to 15 plants may be found. Large nurseries are eagerly growing the blue

honeysuckle bushes and sell[ing] them to the population. Commercial plantations of the crop, each covering from 10 to 25 hectares [25 to 62 acres], are concentrated mostly in western Siberia.

The major advantage of blue honeysuckle that facilitated its rapid spread over Russia is its extra-early ripening. The taste and colour of berries reminds one of high-bush blueberry. Blue honeysuckle ripens 10 to 14 days earlier than strawberry. Ripening occurs when the orchards produce very few vitamin-containing products, therefore blue honeysuckle makes a good addition to the people's diet, as its berries contain 6-8% sugars, 2-3% acids, 40-170 milligrams of vitamin C per 100 grams, and from 1,200 up to 1,800 biologically active polyphenols per 100 grams. Berries can be consumed fresh or frozen. They are used for producing jam, juice, fruit and berry infant food mixtures, [and] beverages, as well as for obtaining natural food pigment or dark red colour, which is used in caramel and marmalade production.

By 1995, over 50 blue honeysuckle varieties had been registered in Russia. All of them were developed from *Lonicera caerulea*. Among the species forms, those with bitter-tasting, hardly edible berries prevail. Good-tasting sour-sweet berries with nice aroma are characteristic only of *L. caerulea* var. *kamtschatica* that grows in the Asiatic part of Russia on the Pacific Coast, in Kamchatka Peninsula and in eastern Siberia. It is from seedlings of that particular strain from Kamchatka that the first varieties of blue honeysuckle, namely 'Sinyaya Ptitsa', 'Goluboye Vereteno', 'Gerda', 'Fialka', 'Morena', etc. have been selected. All of them are noted for large fruit.

One berry reaches 1.5 to 2 grams in weight at a length of 3 to 4 centimetres. Ripe berries are easy to detach from the pedicel; they can easily be harvested both manually and with a berry-picking combine. The other advantage of blue honeysuckle is its outstanding winter hardiness, allowing for cultivation of the crop as far north as far north as agriculture in open ground is even possible, even beyond the Polar Circle. In winter, the plants can stand frosts down to -46 degrees Celsius [-51 degrees Fahrenheit] without being damaged. In springtime, flowers withstand frosts of -8 degrees Celsius [18 degrees Fahrenheit] this crop is only suitable for cultivation in the northern temperate climates. In the south, winters with frequent fluctuations from cold to warmth will damage flowering buds.

Blue honeysuckle is a thick upright bush from 1.0 to 1.8 meters, 1.5 to 2.0 meters in diameter. These are the dimensions reached by the bush on the 10th to 14th year after planting. During the first years, the plant grows comparatively slowly, but a yield of 300 to 500 grams of berries [per bush] can be obtained in the second to third year after planting. Maximum yields of 2 to 5 kilograms per bush are obtained from 7- to 15-year-old plants. Blue honeysuckle is a long-lived plant that can be grown in a Garden for 25 to 30 years.

Blue honeysuckle is a cross-pollinated plant, like apple, plum, or sour cherry. A good yield of berries is obtainable only by planting two to three different varieties together. Bumblebees and bees act as pollinators, for blue honeysuckle is a good nectar plant that flowers in early May. Concerning soil requirements, blue honeysuckle is not demanding. Soil acidity may vary from acid to neutral, with pH from 5 to 7. Humus content in soil should be high; its deficiency can be compensated for with organic fertilizers. Blue honeysuckle grows well on moist land, but swamped places are inappropriate. The highest yields can be obtained in open, sunny places.

The best season for planting blue honeysuckle is autumn. Spring planting is absolutely unacceptable, for plants start growing at an air temperature around 0 to 2 degrees Celsius [32 to 36 degrees Fahrenheit] when the soil is not ready for field work.... No pruning is performed on young plants. After 8 to 10 years of fruiting, lightening or thinning type [of pruning] should be applied. In order to obtain annually long shoots and, consequently, good yields, application of nitrogen mineral fertilizers is recommended in spring., and of phosphorus and potassium in autumn. Soil around plants should be mulched with organic matter.

Blue honeysuckle is resistant to fungus diseases of leaves and berries. Protection from birds is required at harvest season.... The plant is propagated by green cuttings, bush division, and ... tissue culture. Seed sowing is used only for breeding purposes. The N.I. Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Industry (VIR), the Russian plant gene bank, holds the first place in Russia in domestication of blue honeysuckle and other wild-growing fruit and berry plants. Its collection of blue honeysuckle varieties and species is the most complete one in Russia and numbers over 400 accessions.

What does it taste like?

How would we describe the flavour of a Honeyberry? Well, with great difficulty! Flavour is how our brains synthesize aromas, taste, and texture into an overall experience. The challenge comes when we need to communicate this and for others to agree. Although related, flavour, aroma, and taste are not exactly interchangeable.

The berries have an excellent wild fruity aroma and a bitter tang to them. They have a bittersweet taste and a deeper berry flavour to them compared to other soft fruits. The tang is sharp, but not tart and it makes you want to come back for more. The simple taste description is a cross between a Black Raspberry and a Wild Blue Blueberry, with a hint of a Sangiovese grape. Sounds delicious? We and many others think so!

Why has it remained the ‘World’s tastiest secret?’

There are some 18th and 19th-century references to an “edible, early ripening wild berry resembling a Blueberry” in Russian and Japanese texts. The historically closed societies of both these nations made publication of any information concerning this edible blue-berry difficult. Perhaps we could argue one of the best side benefits of glasnost, which marked the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1986, was the introduction of the Russian-bred Honeyberries and research to the world.

The early Honeyberry varieties did not excite

We have listed over 30 of our favourite Honeyberry and Haskap varieties in this guide from our four favoured breeding sources in North America and Europe - Berries Unlimited, Polish Łukaszewska, University of Saskatchewan and Maxine Thompson. This includes a list of our current ‘Best of the Best’ - Only the best varieties will do, page 135.

It may surprise readers that Honeyberries or Sweetberry Honeysuckle was first introduced into Canada in the 1920's by George and Julia Bugnet at the Agricultural Research Station, Beaverlodge, Alberta and many of these plants are still alive today. They proved to be long lived, but their berries were small, bitter and poor quality. It's not surprising that its potential was politely forgotten as a notation in botanical history. How different would the blue soft fruit industry have been if the Bugnet's had bred an Aurora or a Happy Giant or a Wojtek or Blue Banana!

To understand the hard work and fabulous progress our four plant breeders have made since its North American rediscovery in the mid-1990's. We must remind you what was available back in the day for them to work their magic. We have listed the two original Canadian and four traditional Russian varieties which were considered Honeyberry standards for any grower to have in the orchard. Once you have compared their plant spec sheet with today's it is not hard to grasp why the 'Old Guard' left many growers unimpressed and are no longer favoured. Although Berry Blue or Czech 17 will always have a soft spot in our hearts and is considered one of the best Russian varieties introduced into North America.