A cold hardy berry with a sweet flavor that grows on a low bush plant and provides many health benefits when consumed.

- **The first berries of the season, haskaps usually ripen a week or two before strawberries.**
- **Very winter hardy bushes. The flowers can withstand up to a –7°C frost, plants can withstand lows of –40°C or lower and plants can last 50 years**
- **Is known as a super food, high in vitamins A and C and has promising health benefits.**

What is Haskap?

Haskap is a berry with the scientific name of *Lonicera caerulea* L., aka Japanese Honeysuckle, honeyberry, blue-berried honeysuckle, blue honeysuckle, Hascap, Haskaap, and Hasukappu. Bushes have been cultivated since the 1950s with wild plants collected from Russia, Japan and China. It grows on low bushes that have small, medium or large, blue fruit that can be round, oblong or bell shaped (Figure 1). Flowers require cross pollination with an unrelated cultivar that blooms at the same time (Małodobry *et al*, 2010, Lauritzen *et al*. 2015).

Figure 1 Haskap berries ripened on the bush

The "Need to Knows" on Haskap Agronomy

- Plants grow well between Zone 1b to 4. The main issue with warm climates is that plants come out of dormancy too early in the spring.
- Haskap plants grow well in loam soils with a pH between 6.5-8. The optimum organic matter in the soil for haskaps is 2%. Heavy clay can drown out the plants.
- It is essential for the Haskap flowers to get pollinated by insects, bees being some of the best pollinators.
- Two cultivars of Haskap bushes need to be planted in a berry patch. One cultivar will act as the pollinator plant and one pollinator plant is required for every five berry plants.
- Haskap plants require water for their first 2-3 years of growth, once they have established they need minimal water.
- Pruning is best when done late winter, early spring. Thin out the older branches but no more than 25% of a bush a year.
- Haskaps have very little insect or disease pressures, making organic production a possibility. Powdery mildew may show up on leaves after harvest
- The biggest pests to Haskap plants would be berry loving birds, especially cedar waxwings. The best protection against birds is netting around the bushes
- Harvesting usually happens in the last couple day in June to mid July. The plants have very low retention value and berries fall off bushes quickly. Tarps underneath the bushes are a good option to catch the berries.

Research

Cultivar research is the main focus at the moment due to the high variability in the crop, especially in time of ripeness and flavour quality of the berries. Breeding programs for the berries are being done at Corvallis, WA by Thompson (2006), who introduced the berries into North America, and by Bors (2009) in Saskatoon, SK. Medicinal research is the main focus of the scientific literature as the fruit is a traditional medicine and shows promise in decreasing tumours.

Sourced from Culinary Tourism Alliance

Further Research Needed

As this is a new crop, cultivars can show some inconsistent traits and large growth/quality variability. Consistent growth and berry quality is key to providing a superior crop. There are no registered herbicides at this point in time which could help with establishment.

Health Factors

The Japanese have traditionally called this berry the fruit of longevity and vision. One of the current super foods, Haskap have a high amount of Vitamin A and C, as well as promising medicinal benefits (Rupasinghe *et al*. 2012). Haskaps also have very high levels of antioxidants compared to other healthy berries, (Figure 2). Many products can be made from the fruit including jam, jelly, wine, juice, candy and syrups.

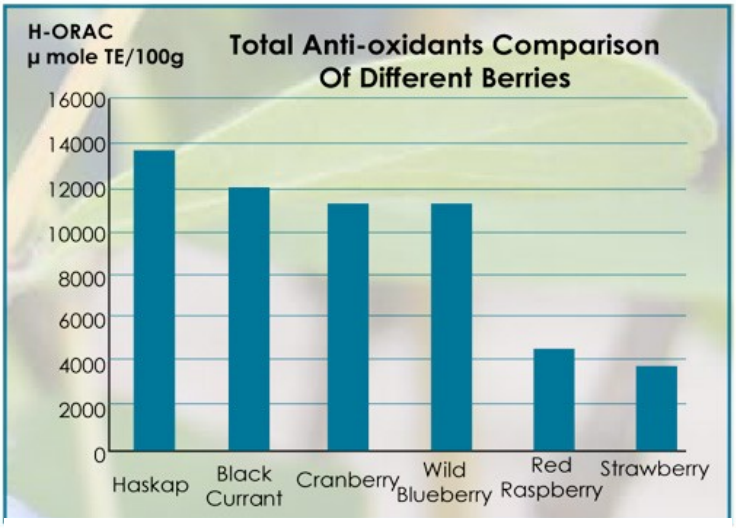

Figure 1; Based on averages from 3 studies: Brunswick Labs, 2011, Wu etal., 2004, USDA, 2007

Fun Facts About Haskap Berries

The plants have few suckers and the berries can shake off the plant when ripe, which can be beneficial for mechanical harvesting.

The cold hardiness of this crop is appealing to Northern Ontario, withstanding lows to –40°C or lower (Gerbrandt 2014).

Ripening weeks before strawberries, their flavour is compared to raspberry and blueberry combined. These plants can last for over 50 years (Gerbrandt 2014).

Views from the Field

The Northeastern Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association has completed Haskap trials at demonstration sites. Gambles (2016) reports the soils with more organic matter had higher levels of growth compared to the more mineral soils. Haskap is also a poor competitor of weeds and is susceptible to powdery mildew. When picking the berries, the fruit is very tender and needs to be placed in shallow containers to avoid spoilage. Predation from birds can reduce yield.

Sourced from Alberta Home Gardening

For More information:

Haskap Canada's mission is to provide information on Haskap for breeders, producers and marketers. More information can be found at **Haskap.ca**

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Haskap bushes under protective bird netting. *Sourced from: ON Specialty Crops*