

# Highbush Blueberry Varieties for Nova Scotia

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## Introduction

Highbush blueberries are suited to small scale production by part time growers, as well as full time operated large commercial operations. Several marketing options exist in Nova Scotia for a highbush blueberry grower and they include wholesale markets, local retail markets (grocery stores), roadside stands, and pick your own operations. Highbush blueberries are not commonly processed in Nova Scotia. Currently in Nova Scotia, there are over 200 acres of producing highbush blueberry plants. Over 1 million pounds of blueberries are produced on this acreage with a farm gate value of over 3 million dollars.

## Production Considerations

Highbush blueberries grow best on sandy loam soils with a pH in the range of 4.5-5.0. Adequate drainage is vitally important, but so too is the availability of moisture, especially during the summer months. There are a number of highbush blueberry varieties available that have potential for production in the Nova Scotia climate and they are listed below in order of ripening. Special attention should be made to the hardiness rating, as not all varieties will grow well in every area of the province.

### **Duke: Early Season**

Fruit: Large, medium blue, open cluster, small scar, firm, mild crisp flavor, very productive

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

Hardiness: Moderate to hardy

Duke is a relatively new highbush blueberry introduction (1987) and at present is the most popular variety for new plantings because of its very heavy production and high quality, even sized fruit. It has a mild and crisp flavor 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.

### **Reka: Early Season**

Fruit: Medium size berry, dark blue color, small scar, firm fruit, very good flavor

Bush: Upright, vigorous growth; height 1.5 -1.8 m (5-6 ft)

Hardiness: Moderate to hardy

Reka is a New Zealand variety with high yields and tolerant of many soil conditions. Primary use is for the processing market as it can be easily harvested by machine, or in the fresh market. This berry has excellent flavor.

**Spartan: Early Season**

Fruit: Large, light blue color, medium sized scar, firm fruit

Bush: Open, upright; height 1.5 – 1.8 m (5-6 ft)

Hardiness: Hardy

Spartan was released in 1981 and usually blooms late, but ripens early, thus avoiding frost injury. The fruit have excellent to superb flavor 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.

**Patriot: Early Season**

Fruit: Medium to large sized, medium blue color, small scar, firm fruit

Bush: Moderate size as it is a half high variety, open, upright shape; height 1.2 m (4 ft)

Hardiness: Very hardy

Introduced in 1976, Patriot is a short bush of moderate productivity, known to be tolerant of heavier soils. The branches tend to be flexible and will bend under a heavy snow load. Patriot is sensitive to early spring frost due to its early blooming habit. Berries must be fully ripe for good flavor and sweetness. If picked too early, there tends to be half red (“red back”) coloring on the berry. The primary market for Patriot is u-pick or farm market sales. Patriot is resistant to Phytophthora root rot and is very hardy because it has low bush blueberry in its parentage.

**Northland: Early Midseason**

Fruit: Medium size berry, medium blue color, medium sized scar, and soft fruit

Bush: Low bush growth; height 0.9 – 1.2 m (3 – 4 ft)

Hardiness: Very hardy

Northland was released in 1968. It is a “half high” variety known for its hardiness and high yields; however, it requires heavy annual pruning. 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 flavor. Northland is susceptible to mummy berry.

**Bluejay: Early Midseason**

Fruit: Medium size berry, light blue, small dry scar, very firm, crunchy, mild flavor, extremely vigorous, productive

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

Hardiness: Hardy

Introduced in 1978 Bluejay is an easy to establish variety that is the most suitable for mechanical harvesting. The fruit is at the periphery of the plant and is very firm, resists cracking, 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. The production is excellent if protected from frost during bloom. This variety is also good for u-pick markets.

**Bluecrop: Midseason**

Fruit: Medium to large size fruit, light blue color, small scar, very firm, good flavor (although tart)

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

Hardiness: Hardy

Released in 1952 Bluecrop is the most widely grown variety in the world. It has excellent fruit quality for both fresh and processing markets. The 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. There is moderate resistance to mummy berry disease.

**Blueray: Midseason**

Fruit: Large, medium to dark blue color, medium sized scar, firm fruit

Bush: Open, upright shape; height 1.2 – 1.8 m (4-6 ft)

Hardiness: Very hardy

Introduced in 1959, Blueray is a winter hardy variety consistently producing good yields. This variety tends to over produce so it needs heavy annual pruning. It is susceptible to mummy berry and anthracnose fruit rot. The berry has excellent flavor and is good for u-pick markets.

**Toro: Midseason**

Fruit: Large sized, light blue color, small scar, firm fruit

Bush: Open, upright shape; height 1.5 -1.8 m (5-6 ft)

Hardiness: Hardy

Toro was released in 1987 and is a hardy variety. It is not usually a heavy producer and the wood is hard to prune. The berries are produced in tight clusters and require several picks during the season. This variety has a mild flavor and does well in u-pick or local farm markets.

**Bluegold: Midseason**

Fruit: Medium sized, light blue in color, small dry scar, firm berry, tart flavor

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, local farm markets as it has good shelf life; however, it

can also be used for u-pick or the processing industry. This variety is susceptible to mummy berry.

**Nelson: Late Midseason**

Fruit: Large, light blue, small dry scar, firm and flavorful

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

Hardiness: Very hardy

Nelson is a relatively recent introduction (1988) that is an good choice for growers who need excellent quality fruit with exceptional flavor; however, fluctuating dry and wet weather conditions is known to promote berry splitting in this variety. The fruit is very large, similar to Spartan, firm, with light blue color and excellent flavor. 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 are consistent and quite high. Nelson is also a superior pollinator.

**Rubel: Late Midseason**

Fruit: Small to medium size berry, medium blue color, medium sized scar, firm berry

Bush: Open, upright growth; height 1.5 -1.8 m (5-6 ft)

Hardiness: Hardy

Rubel is a wild variety with high antioxidant content, preferred by pharmaceutical companies for neutraceutical and functional food processing. This variety has fairly consistent yields with small fruit in loose clusters which make it good for machine harvesting. It is an ideal processing berry because of its small size and low stem count and it has excellent flavor. This variety is susceptible to mummy berry disease.

**Darrow: Late Midseason**

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

Bush: Low, bush growth; height 1.5 m (5 ft)

Hardiness: Limited hardiness

Darrow has a medium to large sized scar that often results in the ‘bleeding’ of berries. It produces large, slightly tart flavored berries that are suitable for u-pick or local farm markets. Due to its limited hardiness, Darrow may not be suitable in the colder areas of Nova Scotia. Darrow berries are resistant to mummy berry.

**Bonus: Late Midseason**

Fruit: Very large, light blue color, medium sized scar, firm berries

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

Hardiness: Hardy

Bonus is a new variety but is known to have excellent productivity of exceptionally large fruit with good flavor. Used for the fresh market or u-pick operations.

**Jersey: Late Midseason**

Fruit: Medium size, light blue color, medium scar, firm and fair flavor

Bush: Vigorous, upright-bushy, easy to grow and productive; height 1.8 - 2.1 m (6-7 ft)

Hardiness: Hardy

Introduced in 1928 Jersey is one of the oldest and most widely grown of all varieties. It can be grown successfully in most types of soil and provides consistent, high yields across a broad range of conditions, provided that pollination is adequate. It is resistant to cracking and suitable for mechanical harvesting and processing markets. Jersey is a favorite with home gardeners wanting an easy to grow, heavy producing late season variety. Some resistance to mummy berry, but susceptible to Phomopsis twig blight.

**Burlington: Late Season**

Fruit: Medium size, medium blue color, small picking scar, firm and good flavor

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

Hardiness: Very hardy

Burlington is a very productive variety introduced in 1939. It lasts about a week longer than Jersey and is resistant to cracking and stores very well. It is liked for its excellent winter hardiness, fine scar and good keeping quality in cold storage but has a smallish berry. 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.

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