

Prairie Fruit Summary, 2010

Some key considerations for the homeowner

by Bob Bors

The following list highlights some key positive (+), negative (-) and variable (\pm) attributes for growing fruit crops on the Canadian Prairies for home gardeners. Keep in mind that these are generalities and that new varieties and growing methods might change some negative attributes. Commercial growers would have other considerations such as suitability of mechanized harvesting and cost of production which this list does not take into account. For more info visit: www.fruit.usask.ca

Haskap/Blue Honeysuckle:

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| - All varieties are very cold hardy | + 1 st fruit to ripen |
| + Flowers are frost resistant to -7 ^o C | + Minimal pruning needed, no suckers |
| + Few pests | + Many uses for fruit |
| + Has tolerance for wet conditions | + One of the highest antioxidant berries..beats blueberries! |
| \pm Can taste great (raspberry/blueberry) or horrible (tonic water) depending on the variety | \pm Some varieties get mildew on leaves |
| - May need bird netting | - Needs 2 unrelated varieties for cross pollination |

Saskatoon

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| + All varieties are very cold hardy | + One of the few fruits for mid summer |
| + Plants need minimal training, and periodic thinning. | + Firm berry good for pies, pastry and other uses. |
| \pm Some varieties compact and spreading but others get too tall and dense | + High in antioxidants |
| - Many insect pests and diseases | - Tends to bloom early and can get frost damage every few years |
| - Somewhat aggressive suckering | - May need bird netting |

Raspberry

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| + Late bloomer so avoids frost damage | + Good tasting varieties available |
| \pm Some varieties cold hardy | - Annual pruning required which thorns make difficult |
| - Several diseases and pest | - Aggressive suckering for most varieties |

Dwarf Sour Cherry

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| + Varieties available with high quality fruit, much higher sugar and flavour than traditional sour cherries | + Dwarf and on their own roots, this is not the case for sour cherries developed elsewhere in the world |
| + Few pests and diseases | + High yielding |
| + Plants need minimal training, and periodic thinning. | + Relatively late bloomer, less chance of frost damage |
| + Fruits hold onto bushes and won't drop easily when ripe. Fruit can dry on the trees and still taste good. | + Usually has a 3 week long harvest window when it can be picked and taste great. |
| ± Low or moderate suckering for most varieties | ± Some varieties more hardy than others |

Black Currants

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| + All varieties are very cold hardy | + High in antioxidants |
| + Plants need minimal training, and periodic thinning. | + Well behaved plants don't sucker much, moderate height |
| ± Some varieties are mildew resistant | - Dried flower stays stuck to fruit and stem stays on fruit when picked |
| ± Strong unique flavour that some like | - Can get caterpillars that will defoliate plants |

Choke Cherry

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| + All varieties are very cold hardy | + Red leafed varieties are ornamental |
| + Fruit can be black, red, orange or yellow | - Black knot disease is damaging and ugly |
| - Poor flavour, needs processing but some like it | - Highly aggressive suckering, need regular pruning and training |
| - Leaves and pits can be toxic | - Some tendency to bloom too early and get frost damage on flowers |

Plum

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| + Many varieties tasty | + Slightly suckering unless Sandcherry is the rootstock |
| + Not many pests | ± Variable hardiness depending on variety and year |
| ± Can be on own roots or grafted onto rootstocks | - Fruit smaller than what is seen in grocery stores |
| - Need two compatible varieties, some types need a wild plum for pollination | - Tends to bloom early so can get frost damage some years |
| - Fruits drop quickly when ripe | |

Cherry Plum

- + Can be beautiful in flower and in fruit if taken care of
- Fresh fruit usually astringent, needs to be processed. At peak ripeness may be ok flavour.
- Name misleading, tastes nothing like a cherry
- + Low lying shrub, often with nice fall colour and glossy leaves
- ± Varieties that are dark red inside make nicer looking jam. Those that are green inside make ugly jam.
- Often dies back to snowline or ground in cold years, especially older branches

Apple

- + Can have large fruit and easy picking
- ± Varieties are highly variable for hardiness and fruit quality
- + Light suckering at base of tree
- Fruit needs to be thinned to promote annual production and good size fruit
- Trunk susceptible to mice and sunscald damage in winter especially when young
- + Much fewer pests growing on Prairie than other regions
- ± Fruit of some newer varieties can be stored a few months, others only a few weeks
- + Usually doesn't get frost damage on flowers
- All trees are grafted
- Trees require regular training and pruning

Grape

- + A few varieties (2?) and wild grapes can survive here
- Prairie varieties have small fruits with many seeds and all are black coloured
- Often get dieback
- Limited use in jam and juice
- + A vine that has many potential uses in the landscape on trellises and to cover up fences
- + Wild grapes and their hybrids have high nutritional value (resveritrol)
- Techniques exist to grow less hardy varieties here but these methods have not been tried much nor proven
- Vines are very aggressive requiring extensive pruning each year

Strawberry

- + Good tasting varieties available
- + Only need 1 variety for fruit set
- Needs to be renovated frequently
- ± Some pest problems
- Needs straw covering for winter
- Weeds often a big problem

Pear

- ± The tallest of all fruit trees for the prairie. Good if you want a big tree.
- ± Only prairie varieties are hardy
- Most varieties have small fruit that drop quickly when ripe, making a mess
- Fruit quality is very poor compared to pears in grocery stores; often highly astringent
- Needs 2 varieties for cross pollination

Seabuckthorn

- + All varieties are highly cold hardy
- + Drought tolerant
- + Nutritious fruit rich in oil soluble vitamins
- ± Seeds that are like small grape seeds make it undesirable for whole fruit uses like pies or pastries. Need to press the juice to use the fruit. Oils in seeds have uses in cosmetics.
- Perhaps the most aggressive suckering fruit crop. Could keep in bounds with annual pruning and grass. Has become invasive in some regions of the world.
- + The bush makes its own nitrogen, and does alright on marginal land
- + Impressively decorative gray thin leaves
- ± Good for juice, tea, and other products but too sour for fresh eating. Juice is like orange juice if sweetened
- ± Horrible long thorns that can go through gloves. Some new varieties have less thorns. Fruit does not come off easy so dodging thorns becomes an issue at harvest time.
- Plants are either female or male so need both to get fruit set.
- Doesn't like wet conditions

A companion article “Popular Fruit Varieties” gives information of the better varieties for each fruit crop. For more info visit: www.fruit.usask.ca