

Beginning Berry Production

Alberta's commercial berry industry centers around four crops:

- strawberries
- raspberries
- saskatoons
- black currants

Interest in sour cherries and haskap is increasing, and plantings of these berry crops are also being established.

Things to consider

The location of a berry farm is important. Consideration should be paid to the proximity of urban centers (if selling direct to consumer), the climate (heat pockets, chinook wind, etc.), soil conditions, air/soil drainage, and shelter.

All berry crops prefer soils with a high level of organic matter. Strawberries perform best on sandy loam soils, raspberries on loam to clay loam, and black currants and saskatoon on most soils.

Adequate shelter is very important to berry production. Shelter should be placed to reduce the prevailing winds of summer and winter. Shelter reduces desiccation (drying), improves snow coverage and provides winter protection.

Permanent shelters should be spaced 122 to 152 m (400 - 600 ft) apart. Supplementary shelter provided by silage corn or sunflowers should be planted every 9 to 15 m (30 - 50 ft) in rows, also perpendicular to prevailing winds. It is important not to plant raspberries directly south of an east-west shelterbelt due to the possibility of warm air pocketing during winter (dormant) months.

The majority of Alberta's berry production is presently sold through u-pick operations. Requirements for u-pick

operations include the proximity to large population centers, all-weather roads, adequate parking, and adequate signage.

A neat, clean, attractive sign is a definite asset. It is the customer's first impression of your farm, your product, and you. Signs should give directions, instructions and information.

The equipment required for berry producers includes the following:

- transplanters
- sprayers
- rototillers
- irrigation
- straw spreaders/rakes (strawberries)
- pruners (raspberry/saskatoons/currants)

Optional equipment:

- fertilizer spreader
- pipe trailer
- frost alarm
- sub-soiler

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Irrigation is a must for berry growers to obtain the maximum production potential from plants. Trickle or drip irrigation is effective and cost-efficient for saskatoons, raspberries and currants.

Strawberry growers should investigate sprinkler irrigation if at all possible. Due to the close row spacings of strawberries, trickle irrigation can become costly. Sprinkler irrigation also assists in the incorporation of herbicides, field cooling, and frost protection of strawberries. If water is limited, a trickle system should be installed. Water sources, quality and quantity should be evaluated before planting.

Production factors to note:

- temperature and climate
- soil characteristics
- plant nutrition
- insects
- diseases
- weeds

All these factors will have an influence on plant health and production.

Varieties

Growers are encouraged to use recommended varieties of berries. Variety trials are conducted yearly throughout the province. Results from these trials, along with grower input, form the basis for varietal recommendations. Here are the present varietal recommendations for berry crops:

Strawberry

Junebearing: *Kent, Glooscap, Cavendish, Honeoye*

Day Neutral: *Albion, Tristar, Seascape*

Raspberry

Boyne, Killarney, Festival, Souris

Primocane Raspberry: *Red River, Double Delight*

Saskatoon

Smoky, Northline, Theissen, Honeywood

Black currant

Ben Lomond, Ben Alder

Plant spacing will depend on the cultivation and spray equipment that will be used between the rows. Here are some general planting recommendations:

June-bearing strawberries:

- between plants 0.3 - 0.5 m
- between rows 1.2 - 1.5 m

Raspberries:

- between plants 0.6 - 1.0 m
- between rows 3 - 5 m

Saskatoons/black currants:

- between plants .6 - 1.0 m
- between rows 3.5 - 5.5 m

Crop yields vary yearly and may be influenced by a number of factors such as winter survival, sunlight, temperature, soil fertility, water, etc.

Average Alberta yields of crops grown under irrigation with proper nutrition are shown below. Individual yields will vary depending on climate and management.

Strawberries: 5,000 - 10,000 lbs/acre

Raspberries: 4,000 - 7,000 lbs/acre

Saskatoons (mature 7 yrs): 2,000 - 4,000 lb/acre

Black currants: 4,000 - 8,000 lb/acre.

Information sources

Strawberry

Compendium of Strawberry Diseases

(includes insects) Second Edition

The American Phytopathological Society

3340 Pilot Knob Road

St. Paul, MN 55121-2097 USA

Tel: 1-651-454-7250

www.apsnet.org

Commercial Strawberry Production on the Prairies

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

7000 - 113 Street

Edmonton, AB

Tel: 780-427-0391

www.agriculture.alberta.ca

Integrated Pest Management for Strawberry

#3351

Publications Division of Agric & Natural Resources

University of California, 6701 San Pablo Avenue

Oakland, CA 946608-2431 USA

www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/ipmprojects/ads_manual_strawberry

Raspberry

Compendium of Raspberry & Blackberry Diseases & Insects

American Phytopathological Society

3340 Pilot Knob Road

St. Paul, MN 55121-2097 USA

Tel: 1-651-454-7250

www.apsnet.org

Saskatoons

Saskatoon Berry Production Manual

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

7000 - 113 Street

Edmonton, AB

Tel: 780-427-0391

www.agriculture.alberta.ca

Dwarf Sour Cherries

Dwarf Sour Cherries: A Guide for Commercial Production

University Extension Press

University of Saskatchewan

#237-221 Cumberland Avenue North

Saskatoon, SK S7N 1M3

Tel: (306)966-5565, Fax: (306)966-5567

E-mail: uep.books@usask.ca

Videos or DVDs

Fruit: A Growing Industry in Alberta includes both
Ins and Outs of Saskatoon Production and *Pick of the Crop*

\$20.00 plus GST, shipping and handling

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

Tel: 780-427-0391

www.agriculture.alberta.ca

Provincial Organizations*

Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association

www.albertafarmfresh.com

*provincial organizations sponsor a Berry Production
School yearly

Hort Snacks (a horticulture crop production and
marketing newsletter) published by Commercial
Horticulture Specialist

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