

NEWS RELEASE

New Berry Plant for Alaska

“The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture.”
— Thomas Jefferson, 1800

Brian and Laurie Olson, owners of Alaska Berries, are pleased to announce their successful cultivation and development of several new strains of the haskap berry plant. They are excited for the potential that haskaps bring to the state of Alaska. The plants are hardy and healthy, well-suited to cultivation in south-central Alaska.

The primary reason the Olsons started their farm was to provide Alaska-hardy berry plants. In 2006, Brian Olson came across the Japanese variety of haskap while doing research for his berry farm. He purchased parent stock from a plant researcher in the lower 48, and collected seeds from the best plants each season, growing those seeds and continuing to select the superior plants for further testing. Alaska Berries now has many separate strains of haskap and are continuing with their cultivation and research. The Olsons are proud to be the first to produce these new varieties of haskaps in Alaska.

For the past five years the Olsons have been growing a variety of seedlings on their berry farm near Soldotna from *Lonicera Caerulea*, var. *emphyllocalyx*, commonly known as the haskap. This berry bush, in the honeysuckle family, has its roots in the Hokkaido region of Japan. The ancient Ainu peoples of Japan had several names for this plant, which roughly translate to “many presents at the end of branches.” “Gift berry” is a fitting description, as the haskap offers many advantages to Alaskans:

- Haskap fruit surpasses even the blueberry in some areas of health benefits. It is very high in phenols, vitamins A and C, antioxidants, anthocyanins and bioflavonoids.
- The haskap grows well in south-central Alaska, is winter-hardy, long lived, and shows very little susceptibility to disease or insects. It grows fast and bears some fruit by the second year, with quantities increasing each year.



2 year old haskap

- Haskap berries are dark blue, oblong-shaped and grow on thornless branches. The berries are firm, juicy like a ripe strawberry, yet not fragile like raspberries. The flavor is described as sweet, with a little tart; a blend of the flavors of blueberries, raspberries and strawberries. Haskap berries are ready to harvest in early to mid-August.



haskap flowers

haskap fruit

haskap ripe fruit

With those qualities, there are many possibilities for the haskap. The Olsons were the first in the U.S. to commercially produce and sell haskap jam, which has been a resounding success. They plan on opening a winery utilizing the haskap as Alaska's own version of the grape.

Alaska Berries is planning to release haskap plant varieties for sale to Alaskans by spring 2014. As family farmers still operating their commercial berry farm on a daily basis, they aren't able to take time from farming to answer individual questions about this announcement, but they remain committed to sharing the gift of this resource with the rest of their state. Any further information or updates about the haskap will be posted on the Alaska Berries website at www.alaskaberries.com.