‘Aurora’ Haskap

‘Aurora’ was released to propagators in 2012 and began to be available to fruit growers and gardeners in 2014. It obtained Canadian plant breeders rights in 2018 (certificate 5750). It was selected as one of the best of the mid-season types from among 10,000 seedlings and a decade of breeding.

‘Aurora’ was originally selected to be a companion variety for ‘Borealis’ ‘Tundra’, and ‘Indigo’ series Haskap. ‘Aurora’ gave excellent set when hand crossed to all those varieties and was observed to bloom in sync with them. It was also found to be compatible with ‘Honey Bee’. The 1st growers of ‘Aurora’ often planted them in low numbers to serve as a pollinator for ‘Tundra’ or ‘Indigo Gem’. As growers became familiar with ‘Aurora’ it became clear that ‘Aurora’ was the superior variety so growers began planting fields with mostly ‘Aurora’ plants with ‘Tundra’ or ‘Indigo Gem’ being used as the pollinator. Recent observation trials at the University of Saskatchewan indicate that ‘Aurora’ and ‘Honey Bee’ are the most productive of the early blooming and ripening varieties and those 2 should be planted together for cross-pollination.

Figure 1. Aurora berries.

Table 1: 'Aurora' statistics.

Traits	'Aurora'
Fruit Weight	1.9 grams
Fruit Shape	Pointed Pear somewhat
Fruit Seen	Fruit easily seen on bushes
Season (in SK)	Late June / early Aug
Mildew Resistance	High Resistance
Bush Shape	Upright & spreading
Bush Height	5 to 5.5 ft
Fruit retention	Easy to pick
Flavour	Excellent
Bloom Time (in SK)	Mid May
Productivity	High
Lineage type	Russian x Japanese
Lineage, parents	Solovey x MT46.55

'Aurora' has similar great flavour 2 our 1st varieties but 'Aurora' tastes sweeter and is more productive. Several experienced growers at our 2012 'Haskap Day' remarked "I didn't know Haskap could get that sweet". However, lab tests of 'Aurora' indicate that it has sugar levels similar to most haskap but it has half the acidity of most other Haskap. That low acidity makes it taste sweeter.

'Aurora' has an upright growth habit ideal for mechanical harvesting. It will grow 1.5 to 2.0 m tall. Young plants of it are growing 50% taller than 'Tundra' or 'Indigo Gem' varieties. It has a similar size bush to most Japanese or Russian varieties. Its recommended pollinator 'Honey Bee' is a little more vigourous and may grow 1.75 to 2.25 m tall.

In our observation trial, 'Honey Bee' was more productive than 'Aurora' in early but by later both had similar productivity (see figure 2). We felt this was due to 'Honey Bee' getting too crowded and needing thinning while 'Aurora' had a more open growth habit and did not yet need thinning.

'Aurora' is a hybrid between early and late blooming types and tends to bloom and ripen about a week after most Russian varieties currently on the market. It is fully hardy at our breeding site in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (which was classified as hardiness zone 2 but is now classified as hardiness zone 3). It is expected that they can be grown farther south than pure Russian varieties but we don't know how far south that could be. They are not the first to bloom which is a good thing for southern areas. In our location, Russian varieties bloom 1 month before the last frost, but 'Aurora ' and 'Honey Bee' bloom 2 weeks before the last frost. Also, both have good resistance level to mildew which is a problem in more southern locations.

My guess would be that Zone 5 will be dependable production and that Zone 6 will have problems in some years. Zone 7 may be too warm. Those are just guesses. If you do grow Aurora in a warm location please email us and let us know what happens.

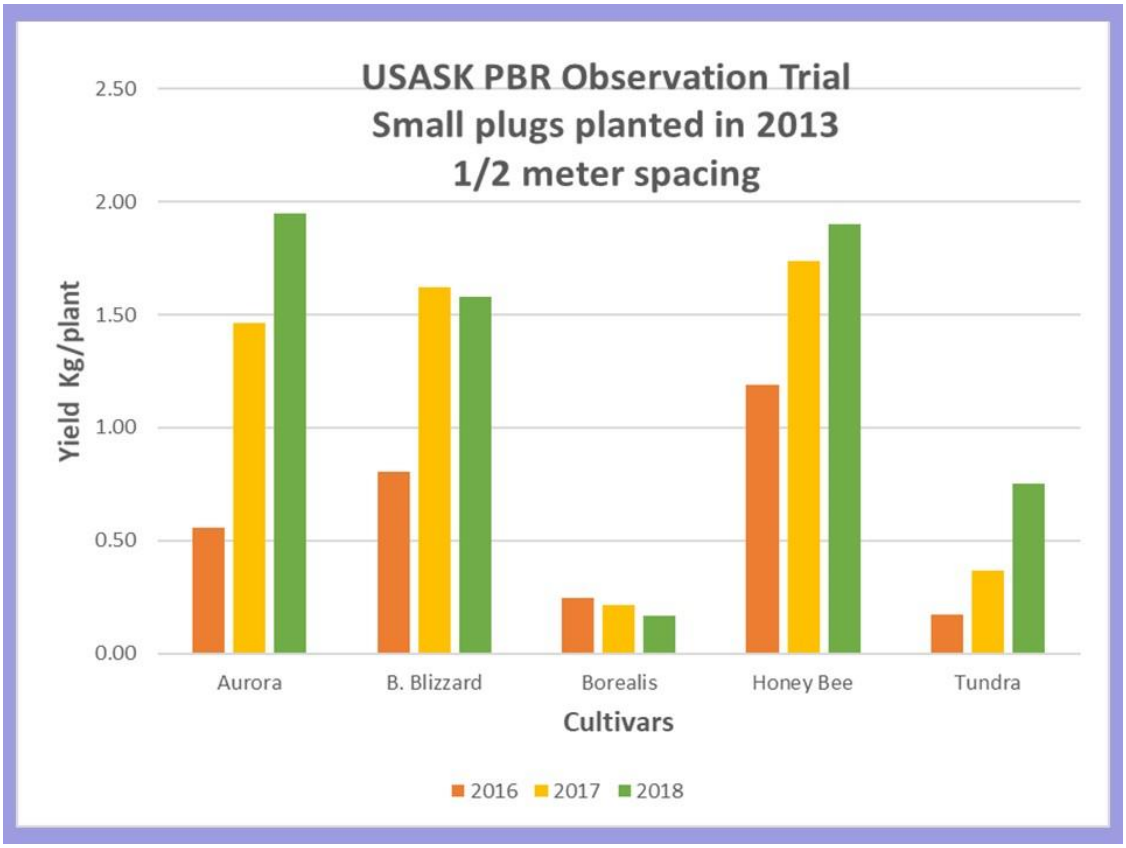

Figure 2: Yield of named Haskap varieties in a USASK observation trial. This trial was originally planted for the purpose of being inspected for plant breeders rights. We needed to demonstrate that 7 plants of a given variety were uniform. It is from these plants that botanical observations and measurements are done to create a description document for plant breeder's rights. A half meter spacing allowed us to fit these named varieties and a dozen unnamed selections in a small space. Once the plants came into production we thought to take yield from these plants. We have since planted a yield trial in another location with 1 m spacing that will give us useful information in a few years. It is expected that plants grow that wider spacing would have higher yields than these plants which are beginning to get crowded.

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