

'Aurora' & 'Borealis' Haskap

These two varieties were named so gardeners buying plants could remember that 'Aurora' and 'Borealis' go together. 'Borealis' had been our favourite for the home gardener since 2007. 'Aurora' is our favourite from more recent breeding efforts. Together, they make a good team with complimentary attributes.

Availability: 'Aurora' is a new haskap variety released to propagators in 2012. Likely it will be available to fruit growers and gardeners in 2013 or 2014. 'Borealis' was released in 2007 and is widely available. Both 'Aurora' and 'Borealis' are undergoing Plant Breeder's Rights Certification with Agriculture Canada.

Compatibility: 'Aurora' was selected to be a companion variety for 'Borealis' but will also pollinize '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. What are companion varieties? It's when the varieties are desirable and will pollinize each other for good fruit set.





Table 1: Similarities & differences between 'Aurora' and 'Borealis' .

| Traits | 'Aurora' | 'Borealis' |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Fruit Weight | 1.9 grams | 1.6 grams. |
| Fruit Shape | Pointed Pear somewhat | Oval & Boxy |
| Fruit Seen | Fruit easily seen on bushes | Fruit hidden by leaves |
| Season (in SK) | Late June / early Aug | July to early August |
| Mildew Resistance | High Resistance | Very High Resistance |
| Bush Shape | Upright & spreading | Wide Spreading |
| Bush Height | 5 to 5.5 ft | 4 to 4.5 ft |
| Fruit retention | Easy to pick | Holds onto fruit |
| Flavour | Excellent | Excellent |
| Bloom Time (in SK) | Mid May | Mid May |
| Productivity | High | High |
| Lineage type | Russian x Japanese | Kurile x Russian |
| Lineage, parents | Solovey x MT46.55 | Kiev#8 x Tomichka |

What's a Pollinizer? Sometimes a variety is called a 'Pollinizer', especially in those crops like Kiwi or Seabuckthorn which have male and female plants. Confusion on this term has caused some gardeners to think there are male and female haskap plants, but that's not true. There is no separation of the sexes with Haskap plants. All haskap plants are capable of producing fruit if they have a companion that blooms at the same time, and which is compatible, and if there are bees around. Other fruits that need companion varieties are apples, plums, apricots, pears, and sweet cherries. Sometimes in the nursery trade a variety is called a 'pollinizer' if it works as a companion but maybe you won't want to grow as much of it.

Attributes: Most important is that 'Aurora' and 'Borealis' have similar great flavour, 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". For many other attributes they have differences that should appeal to home gardeners. Having different shapes is fun. Perhaps 'Borealis' berries have a more lovely shape, but 'Aurora' berries are shockingly different and would make a memorable impression when given to someone. But shape only matters for fresh eating and not cooking. 'Aurora's' larger berries are easier to pick will certainly have more appeal to someone who is planting many bushes.

Just because they are companion varieties does not mean that gardeners have to plant exactly the same number of 'Aurora' and 'Borealis' plants. One 'Aurora' could easily pollinize 8 'Borealis' and similarly 1 'Borealis' could pollinize 8 'Auroras'. As long as the plants are easily seen in the same location by bees they will be fine. But if you plant some in the front yard and some in the back yard, it would be best to have both in both locations. I suspect that gardeners who like to freeze fruit or make jam or wine would want to grow more 'Aurora' since they can harvest them faster. But 'Borealis' thick and compact growth habit may have more appeal as a landscape shrub. When planting these two, keep in mind that 'Aurora' will likely grow ½ meter taller than 'Borealis' or 'Tundra' or 'Indigo' haskap varieties. If planting double rows along a fence or next to a building, plant 'Aurora' in the back and 'Borealis' in the front.

'Aurora' is worth trying in commercial operations, especially if one has a harvester that blows off leaves as the fruit is picked. Its odd shape won't allow it to roll on a sorting line like 'Tundra'. We find that our sideways 'Joanna Harvester' makes our sorting line unnecessary for haskap, since it does such a good job on berries of any shape.

Adaptation Zone: Both 'Aurora' and 'Borealis' are hybrids between early and late blooming types. They are fully hardy in Zone 2 at our breeding site in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. As with all Haskap varieties, open flowers can take -7°C without damage. 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 these 2 varieties bloom 2 weeks

before the last frost. Also, both have good resistance level to mildew which is a problem in more southern locations.

We have a test ongoing in southern BC that will generate more information in 2012 and 2013 about southern adaptation. 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; I'll update this document when we learn more.

Conclusion: The new variety 'Aurora' was selected as one of the best of the mid-season types from among 10,000 seedlings and a decade of breeding. As of its release date, it is the largest fruited haskap on the market in Canada and one of the best tasting. But thanks to royalties from our propagators and Saskatchewan Agriculture's Agriculture Development Fund, we have another 20,000 or so seedlings expected to bear fruit in the next few years. We expect to release more varieties in the not too distant future for orchardists and gardeners.

More Information: www.fruit.usask.ca has many articles, links, and a listing of propagators. In July we have a Haskap Day workshop event.