Berry crops

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
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Berry crops

BLUEBERRIES

Few Western Australians have tasted fresh blueberries, but they are held in high regard in Europe and the United States of America as an ingredient in pies, breads and pastries. The fresh fruit makes a pleasant dessert, and it can be stored frozen.

Most of the varieties used commercially were developed from species which originated in the United States of America, though some are native to northern Europe.

Commercial potential

Blueberries are a new crop to Western Australia. As few are grown yet, no firm recommendations can be offered, however, more than 5000 plants were sown this year. Department of Agriculture officers consider that blueberries will thrive here, given the right combination of varieties and sites.

Active promotion could help develop a local market for blueberries, and our southern hemisphere location could offer export prospects to northern hemisphere markets in their “off season”.

Growth details

Blueberries are the fruit of the Vaccinium species, related to the ericas.

Two types are cultivated in Australia: the high-bush blueberry and the rabbit-eye blueberry. They are deciduous shrubby plants, of which the high-bush variety grows to five metres tall. The plants start bearing two to three years after planting and reach full production in five to seven years. Clusters of bell-shaped flowers form on the ends of shoots, and the fruits develop after pollination by bees. Cross-pollination is not essential for fruiting, but it helps ensure good fruit set and berry size.

High-bush blueberries require winter chilling for good fruit production. The plants prefer acid soils and plenty of soil moisture in summer. They are propagated from cuttings.

BRAMBLEBERRIES AND RASPBERRIES

Brambleberries and raspberries are popular ingredients of a wide range of conserves. The fresh fruit also make excellent desserts.

The commercial raspberry varieties originated in Europe, but the brambleberries, which include loganberries, youngberries, American brambleberries and boysenberries originated in North America.

Commercial potential

Brambleberries grow and crop well in Western Australia’s South-West. Raspberries are less suited because high summer temperatures terminate the growth of new canes.

Without processing facilities, the commercial potential of any of these berry fruits would be limited to the fresh market, with limited outlets for the domestic jam market.

Fresh raspberries do not travel or market well, mainly because the fruit comes free of the core at harvesting.

Growth details

The brambleberries are thorny, trailing vines, somewhat similar to the blackberry. Raspberries also are thorny, but grow upright. They do not require trellising, but brambleberries must be trained onto a two or three wire fence.

Both brambleberries and raspberries fruit on one-year-old canes which die after the fruit is picked. These canes are pruned at ground level, and new canes produced during the season are trained up in their place.

The fruit must be harvested ripe, and cool stored if it is to be transported.