



## **KEN MUIR'S GUIDE TO GROWING SASKATOONS (JUNEBERRIES)**

### **SOIL CONDITIONS**

Unlike blueberries, Saskatoons will grow in any good well-drained, moisture retentive soil and will even tolerate alkaline conditions up to a pH of 7.5. They will thrive in full sun to partial shade and although very hardy, it is best to avoid planting them in a frost pocket as they flower early.

Prior to planting prepare the soil by digging in plenty of organic matter, such as well rotted manure or compost. Plants should be soaked in the pots in which they came, in a shallow tray for 20-30 minutes before planting. Set the plants slightly deeper in the ground than they were when they were growing in their pots. Firm the soil around the roots. Unless you live in a very exposed area, staking should not be necessary.

### **PLANTING DISTANCES**

Saskatoons should be spaced 3.7m (12ft) apart. They can also be used to form a dense hedge, for which plants should be grown approximately 1.5m (5ft) apart.

### **MANURING, MULCHING & WATERING**

Saskatoons prefer to grow in a moist, yet free draining soil, therefore it is important to water plants well during prolonged dry periods, especially during the first couple of years when they are establishing. To help maintain moisture levels and to keep weeds down, a 5-7.5cm (2-3in) layer of mulch should be applied around the base of the plant(s). Feed with a general granular fertiliser such as Growmore each spring.

### **PRUNING**

Saskatoons require very little in the way of pruning during the first few years, however any dead, damaged, diseased or weak growing stems should be removed during this period. Saskatoons fruit on the previous year's growth and on older wood, but the best fruiting usually occurs on vigorous 2-4 year old stems.

Depending on how well your plant is growing, regular renewal pruning should begin around 4-6 years after planting, when a few of the oldest and tallest stems, especially those that are growing towards the centre of the plant should be pruned right down to ground level. Any low-growing branches should also be removed as should any suckers. This procedure should be undertaken each spring before any new growth starts, but after the danger of severe weather has passed. Doing this will encourage the growth of replacement fruiting wood, allow sunlight in, which will aid fruit bud production and by improving air circulation, reduce the incidence of pests and diseases.

### **HARVESTING**

Saskatoons normally ripen over a period of a few weeks, starting from around late June/early July, according to the variety and where you live in the country. Before this time it is advisable to place netting over the plants as birds find the berries very attractive. Fruits, which will turn from pink to deep blue/purple, should be picked when they have changed colour but before they become too soft and over ripe, as they will continue to ripen after harvesting. Care should be taken when picking and handling the fruit, as it can bruise easily. Picked fruit should be placed into shallow containers to prevent damage and stored either in the fridge for using fresh, or frozen.