

Lingonberry

An Attractive Landscape Plant and a Unique Small Fruit

Frequently home owners seek native plants that are attractive, interesting, unusual and easy to care for that also can fit into their landscape. Lingonberry is such a plant. It also produces fruit that are strikingly similar in taste and appearance to it's close relative, the cranberry. It grows 12 to 18 inch high. It is an evergreen shrub that is native to the northern regions of North America and Europe. Plants spread by underground rhizomes, thus making lingonberry a very good candidate as a ground cover or continuous border. It is also known as cowberry or foxberry.

There are two types of lingonberries available. The North American type, *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* variety *minus* is low growing and blooms only in the spring. The European and Asian type, *Vaccinium vitis* variety *majorus* is slightly taller, has larger leaves and flowers and blooms twice each year. This is the type that is most commonly found for sale at nurseries, and is the one that this article will focus on.

Lingonberry flowers are small pinkish flowers that appear in clusters at the tips of 1-year-old wood. The May bloom produces fruit that ripens in July. Flowers are quite frost sensitive so the first crop is often small due to frost. The second crop, which ripens in October, is generally larger and the fruit are of much higher quality because they ripen at a cooler time of year. Fruit are deep red and similar to, but slightly smaller than, a cranberry. Once harvested, fruit should be refrigerated immediately or frozen for later use. Culinarily, they are used in a similar manner to cranberry.

Site and Soil

Lingonberries should be planted in a sunny location. Partial shade is acceptable, but less desirable. Soil should be well drained and have a pH near 5.0. Often the pH of garden soils is much higher so the pH must be lowered. Experts suggest incorporating 7 to 10 pounds per 100 square feet of peat moss into the soil and lowering the pH to 5.0 with elemental sulfur, that is available at most garden centers. Soil preparation and pH adjustment should be done in the fall if planting in the spring is anticipated.

Planting and culture

Purchase potted plants since their survival rate is much higher. Lingonberries are self pollinating but you will get larger fruit, and it will ripen earlier, if more than one variety is selected. Plant in the spring as soon as the soil has dried out enough to be worked without compacting the soil. Plants should be spaced about 12 inches apart in rows spaced 3 to 4 feet apart. Plants should be mulched after planting to help control weeds, aid in maintaining an acidic soil, and to provide a favorable environment for the plants to grow in. Lingonberries increase in size by rhizome growth and this is encouraged by a soil environment that is high in organic matter. Peat moss,



partially decomposed sawdust or bark mulch are the most desirable types of mulch. Mulches that are treated with preservative to prevent decomposition are poor choices for lingonberries. Mulch should be renewed yearly in the spring by applying at least a 2 inch layer around and between plants. During dry periods, plants should be watered. Plant growth is generally slow during the first year when the root system is being established. Plants will start to produce fruit in 2 to 3 years.

Maintenance

Lingonberries require little fertilizer. It is advisable to apply a liquid fertilizer 2 to 3 weeks after planting. If the mulch that is used is not partially decomposed, it is advisable to apply additional liquid nitrogen periodically to prevent nitrogen deficiency the first year. In subsequent years a small amount of complete fertilizer (eg. 5-10-10) may be placed around each plant at bloom and again about 1 month later. If available, ammonium sulfate would be a more appropriate choice as a nitrogen source, since the sulfur in this fertilizer will help keep the pH low. In the early years, little or no pruning is required. As plants fill their space, it may be appropriate to cut plants down to about 2 to 3 inches above the mulch very early in the spring. This will stimulate plant growth and improve fruit size and production.

Insect and disease problems are not well defined for New England. Phytophthora can be a major disease on wet sites. The best solution is to avoid planting in wet sites or use varieties that are less susceptible to this disease. Lingonberry is related to lowbush blueberry and the cranberry, so many of the insects and diseases that afflict these plants may also affect lingonberry.

Partial List of Nurseries Selling Lingonberry

Edible Forest Nursery, Box 260165, Madison, WI 53726, edibleforest55@hotmail.com

Fall Creek Farm & Nursery, 39318 Jasper-Lowell Road, Lowell, OR 97452
Tel.(541) 937-2973, berries@fallcreeknurseries.com

Hartmann's Plant Company, Box 100, Lacota, MI
Tel. (616) 253-4281, info@hartmannsplantcompany.com

Indiana Berry & Plant Co., 5218 West 500 South, Huntington, IN 45742
inberry@psci.net.

Saint Lawrence Nurseries, 325 State Highway 345, Potsdam, NY 13676
Tel. (315) 265-6739, trees@sin.potsdam.ny.us

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