

Lowbush Blueberry Fact Sheet

Evaluating Land for Wild Blueberry Potential

Introduction

When evaluating land for wild blueberry potential there are several factors that must be considered to determine whether or not the land will successfully develop into productive wild blueberry land.

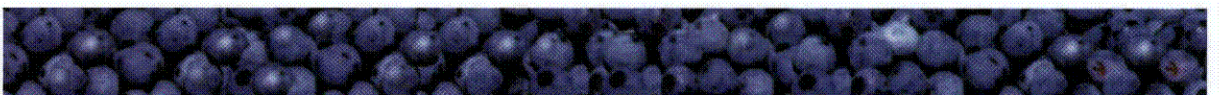
The key factors in determining the potential for wild blueberry production are as follows: (i) amount of naturally occurring blueberries, (ii) history of the land, (iii) weed pressure and type, (iv) soil characteristics, (v) topography, (vi) accessibility and (vii) proximity to commercial blueberry growing areas.

Naturally Occurring Blueberries

The amount of naturally occurring blueberry plants found on the land prior to development is one of the most important factors in determining the potential. The greater the amount of blueberry plants found on the land prior to development, the quicker and more successful the initial production will be. Wild blueberries initially begin from seed. It can take several years for seedlings to grow and spread into a field.



Fig. 1: A blueberry plant in early winter.





History of the Land

Abandoned Farm Land

The land that historically has been developed for this crop is abandoned farm land. It usually has the greatest potential and is generally level. By choosing this type of land, start-up costs related to development will be reduced. Other types of land are developed for wild blueberry production but the development and production costs may be greater.

Woodland

When assessing woodland for development, the density and type of tree cover should be evaluated. When the land has a heavy tree density, the blueberry plants are dormant due to the shading effect caused by the presence of the trees. However, if the surrounding areas have good potential, such as trails, choppings, etc., then it is likely that the treed land will as well. Look for areas where sunlight is penetrating the forest. These areas should be showing signs of naturally occurring wild blueberry plants. It would only be after the trees are removed that the blueberry plant density would be evident. Depending upon the types of trees harvested, they may be resold for a source of income to offset input costs. However, stump removal will add costs since stumps cost money to remove. Stumps should not be removed until they are at least five years old. Pulling them early will remove too much soil that may contain blueberry plants, thus leaving large bare areas. Hardwood forest will need more input due to increased suckering of hardwoods and increased weeds.





Soil Characteristics

Soil characteristics are another key factor to evaluate. Wild lowbush blueberries thrive in sandy, well drained soils with a pH of 4.5-5.5. It takes a longer time for wild blueberries to develop in heavy soils. Heavy soils may also lead to increased erosion, frost heaving and summer baking. Increased disease activity may also occur.

Weed Pressure

Wild blueberries will not be productive if they are in competition with other plants. Therefore, the types of weeds occurring at the time of evaluation must be assessed. Unwanted plants have to be removed to create a positive environment for the blueberries. Some weeds are easily controlled while others can be more difficult.

Topography

The topography of the field is another factor to be considered. Input costs on land that is relatively smooth will be much lower than on rough land. Pruning and harvesting costs will be reduced and, in general, working the land will be easier. Therefore, in the beginning, considerations should be made to choosing land that is relatively smooth. There are a few questions to consider when looking at the positioning of the land. First of all, you should consider the proximity of the land to urban areas as this could prevent engaging in certain pest management practices.



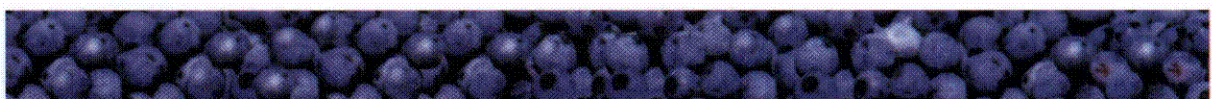
Also, it must be determined if the area may be prone to frost or high winds as each of these factors can decrease the potential production and yield of wild blueberries.

Accessibility

It is very important that the desired piece of land is either presently accessible or that with the construction of roads it will become accessible. Good roads leading into the field will facilitate easier management practices.

Proximity to Other Blueberry Fields

Evaluating the success of nearby commercial areas may give some indication of the potential of the piece in question. If there are commercial fields in the area then the infrastructure for producing blueberries may also be nearby. Custom operators may be available to assist in certain production practices that may not be feasible for individual growers. Having receiving sheds in the area will be a benefit at harvest time.





Summary

Evaluation of all the above factors is important. Wild lowbush blueberry land, when in production, can provide a reasonable return on investment, provided the land is managed properly. However, the most important thing to remember is that it can take several years from initial development to full production. Wild blueberry development requires time, patience, and proper management to achieve success.

See Other Factsheets:

- Growing Wild Lowbush Blueberries in Nova Scotia
- Pruning Wild Blueberries Principles and Practices
- Guide to Weed Control for Wild Blueberry Production in Atlantic Canada

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