

**Latin Name/Genus:** *Amelanchier alnifolia*

Family: *Rosaceae*

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Season:** Warm season

**Exposure:** Full-sun

**Zone:** Hardy to Zone 1



**Timing:** Transplant or sow saskatoon seeds in deep pots covered with fine mulch (to keep seeds moist) in autumn – germination will occur the following spring, when seeds have been exposed to temperatures of 15-18°C for 30 days. Alternatively, seeds can be soaked for 24 hours, placed in a resealable bag with equal parts peat and sand, then cold stratified at 4°C for 90-180 days prior to sowing shallow (4mm deep) and allowing to germinate as above.

**Starting:** Plant in a hole that is big enough to accommodate the entire rootball. Saskatoons should be planted about 2.5-5 cm (1- 2") deeper than they were in the nursery container, as this encourages a multi-stemmed shrub [rather than suckers spreading around the mother plant]; spaced at least 1-1.5 m (3-5') apart from each other. When planted in a hedgerow, saskatoons will fill in the space between each plant within five years to form a solid hedge. Add compost to hole when planting; keep the soil around newly planted shrubs moist (but not waterlogged) for the first 2-3 weeks (mulch is fantastic for this purpose); no need to fertilize newly-planted bushes. Saskatoons can be grown in [large] containers, however, the fruit yield will be much lower than ground-planted Saskatoons.

**Days to Maturity:** From transplant date.

**Growing:** Saskatoons can handle soil pH between 5.5-7.0 and prefer full sun but can grow in part shade (although will produce lower yields, and be more susceptible to problems); tolerant of most soils, but grows best in well-drained loam or sandy loam soils (can tolerate clay soil if well-drained and adequate moisture is maintained). Saskatoons are self-fruiting (therefore you don't require more than one bush , however, plants which have been cross-pollinated by bees will produce more fruit. Keep area at base of bush well-weeded and grass-free to avoid slow growth. Prune saskatoons with sharp pruning scissors/shears in early spring, prior to any new growth; during the first three years, only remove diseased and dead stems, and those drooping too low to the ground. Saskatoon bushes begin producing fruit between their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> seasons, with optimal yields between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> season. Once mature plants become unproductive, they can be cut back to approximately 15cm (6") above the soil surface – this rejuvenates saskatoons. Birds and other animals enjoy these berries, so throwing some netting over any bushes (with holes no larger than 1.25cm (1/2") will prevent fruit from disappearing before harvest.

**Nutrient Preferences:** Due to saskatoons' shallow root system, they tend to not need much fertilizing, especially if compost was used during planting. Apply top dressings of quality compost around base of



## Saskatoons *Plant Care Information*

bush, and sprinkle minimal amounts of a balanced fertilizer around bush base between the flowering stage and harvest for best results.

**Harvest:** Saskatoons produce clusters of white buds in May, and by mid-late June, the deep purple, soft berries are ready to harvest (they do not ripen evenly – multiple harvest required); nearly ripe fruit has more vitamin C and pectin than fully ripe fruit, which has higher sugar content. As the fruit grows in bunches, they are quite easy to pick by hand. Ensure fruit is cooled from field temperatures immediately upon harvesting (using a container/cooler with ice water, place freshly-picked fruit in a bag within the cooler), then preserved immediately to avoid deterioration of fruit; berries do not have abscission zones so skin will tear slightly when picked.

**Companion Planting:** Saskatoons love being planted near bee balm, borage, comfrey (which acts as a natural mulch), cornelian cherry, coneflower, coral bells, coreopsis, dogwood, eastern sweetshrub, forsythia, hairy vetch, hydrangeas, nasturtiums, phlox, rhododendron, viburnum, or any other berry-producing plants – perennial plants as ground cover (instead of annual) is recommended to avoid root disturbance; avoid growing near native junipers (at least 2km) to avoid Saskatoon-Juniper Rust disease.