Danish blueberries –conservation and quality screening

Scientists from the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences have collected berries and shoots of more than 150 clones of common blueberry from every corner of Denmark. The aim is to propagate, plant and grow the clones in an active gene bank and identify those best suited for consumption and production.

While most Danes went on holiday in July, a couple of scientists from the Department of Horticulture were instead busy travelling the country collecting blueberries and blueberry shoots from superior plants.

The collection is part of a project that aims to ensure the genetic conservation of selected, valuable clones of common Danish blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and improve the knowledge base for the future use of genetic resources through propagation of the plant material and characterisation of their quality.

The collected plants are propagated in vitro and planted out in two locations in Denmark – one at Research Centre Aarslev (part of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences) and one at a national forest in West Jutland.

These two plantings will be used to test the characteristics of the clones and will also function as a source of new seeds (clonal seed orchard), whereby seeds with improved genetic traits can be harvested to establish new blueberry plantings.

Brainstorm for future blueberry use
The knowledge of new improved varieties should also benefit consumers and future producers. This is the ambition of Martin Jensen, senior scientist at the Department of Horticulture who is in charge of the project.

- As part of the project we will have a brainstorming meeting where we, among other things, will discuss the many potential uses of common blueberries – including foods, convenience products and plant medicines, he explains.

The project “Danish blueberries – development and activation of Danish genetic resources” has received a 467,496 DKK grant from the genetic conservation programme of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries.

Facts: The project involves the common blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), which is an approx. 25-50 cm tall shrub. Berries from this plant can easily be confused with the blueberries sold in shops, but these are typically from the large-berried American highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*). The American highbush blueberry, which can grow up to 1.5 to 2 metres tall, is a different species that does not grow in the wild in Denmark.

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Billedtekst: The 150 collected blueberry clones are from all over the country. Photo: Connie Damgaard, DJF.