



Gardeners Helping Gardeners Succeed

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All About Blueberries

Planting & Fertilization

Northern Highbush blueberries are self-fertile; Southern Highbush blueberries will produce better crops if more than one variety is planted. Space plants approximately 4 feet apart.

Blueberries demand just the right climate and planting soil but take very little care if you provide them the conditions they require. Like their cousins rhododendrons, azaleas, mountain laurel, and huckleberries, blueberries like soft rich soil which is rich in organic matter, very acid, and extremely well-drained. Blueberries require 800 chilling hours for proper dormancy (perfect for our area!).

When planting, add plenty of compost, but be sparing with manures which are alkaline. Select a site in the yard which will give your new plant some afternoon shade, which is critical in good fruit production (hot, dry afternoon winds may cause thick-skinned, shriveled small berries. Blueberries need constant moisture but will not live if their roots are standing in water. Once planted, try not to cultivate around these plants; their shallow roots are easily damaged. Consider mulching at a depth of 2-4 inches which will aid in moisture retention. Compost or bark products work well. Peat moss dries too quickly in our arid climate and will blow away too readily.

Blueberries will benefit from regular feedings. Commercial fertilizers with an acid base will be of greatest benefit. *Master Nursery Camelia, Azalea, Gardenia and Rhododendron Food* is an excellent granular fertilizer which may be applied 3-4 times yearly. Acid base water soluble fertilizers may be applied semi-monthly from April 15 through August 15 in lieu of granular mixes.

Pruning

For the most efficient pruning, plan to prune when your blueberry bush is dormant—anytime from late November through late February. Blueberry pruning is simple—you don't have to be too precise. Leave the plants basically alone for 2 or 3 seasons, except for broken or damaged branches. Then, about the 4th season, when heavy crops of small berries occur, remove some of the oldest canes and clip out the weakest twigs. For largest berries, clip off the outer third to half of the fruiting twigs you retain.

If you never prune you will still get fruit, but it will be small and eventually decline in quality.

Pests and Disease

Blueberries suffer from few difficulties. You may wish to spray in winter with a **dormant oil and dormant disease** combination spray to kill any overwintering insect or fungus spores. Birds will be your biggest challenge; consider placing bird netting over the shrubs as the berries begin to ripen.

Harvest

Taste testing is truly the most accurate measure of ripeness. Blueberries tend to be a bit tart up until harvest.

Due to the uncertainty of wholesale grower stock, trucking, and weather, all varieties will not be available at all times. Although we do have the ability to special order some stock, we make no guarantee of its arrival and cheerfully encourage alternate selections.

Northern Highbush Varieties

These may reach an overall height of 4-6 feet, depending on variety.

Earliblue: One of the best for all areas. Berry is large, light blue, firm. Fruit keeps well and resists cracking. Ripens early. (800 hours)

Blueray: Large, bright blue berry with outstanding dessert flavor. Excellent ornamental value: stunning pink flowers and burgundy red in fall. Upright growth to 4-6 feet. Performs well in areas with hot summers or very cold winters. Ripens early to mid-season. (850-1000 hours)

Bluejay Enjoy long harvest of flavorful fruit. Perfect for northern gardeners. Resists cracking. Self-pollinating

Berkeley: Medium to large berries. Powder blue, firm with slight aroma, less acid than most. Vigorous, spreading to 5-6 feet. Good ornamental value with brilliant autumn color and yellow twigs in winter. Ripens mid to late season. (850-1000 hours)

Bluecrop: Considered the best for consistent yields. Large, bright blue berries, good dessert quality. Upright bush to 4-6 feet. Excellent ornamental value with fiery red fall color. Ripens mid-season. (850-1000 hours)

Bountiful Blue Pink-blushed flowers produce a big crop of large, sweet, juicy berries on a compact, mounded shrub. Needs only 150-200 winter chill hours. Semi-evergreen in mild climates. Self-pollinating

Chandler: Largest berry, longest ripening season. Ripens mid continuing into late season. Slightly spreading habit to 5/6'. (850-1000 hours)

Darrow: Slightly flat, light blue, with a delightful tart flavor. "Blue ribbon" size berries. Vigorous growth to 5/6'. Orange fall color. Ripens late season. (850-1000 hours)

Duke Large berries, often reaching quarter-size, very productive with a tangy-sweet flavor. Blooms late to avoid spring frosts. Self-pollinating

Elliott Late-season variety with ½' berries that are firm, easy-to-pick and perfect for fresh eating and cooking. Blooms late to avoid spring frosts. Self-pollinating

Northland: Medium size, round, moderately firm, and medium blue. Flavor is good. Spreading plant to 4 feet. Ripens early.

Patriot Quarter-size berries. The largest early-season blueberry. Outstanding flavor fresh, baked, and in preserves. Self-fertile.

Top Hat Compact, dwarf habit 1 to 2ft tall and wide. Excellent for containers, creating a defined border or bonsai. Recommended chill: 1,000 to 1,200 hours. Late summer crop of delicious ½" fruits. Fresh, sweet berries are delightful in desserts.

Bushel & Berry is a unique collection of compact, ornamental and self-pollinating berry plants. They make great landscape plants and do well in containers.

Blueberry Glaze Fruit is deep blue, almost black. Flavor is like a wild blueberry, very aromatic and antioxidant rich. Compact and round at maturity. Leaves are glossy and dark green in growing season followed by reds, purples, and yellows in fall.

Jelly Bean Foliage is light green with red tips throughout the growing season. Transitions to yellow and red in the fall. Compact, bush produces bumper crops of sweet, flavorful berries.

Peach Sorbet Growing season foliage ranges from peach to pink, orange, and emerald green. Fall color takes on an eggplant purple shade. Fruit is sweet with a tropical essence.

Perpetua Fruits on new growth. Most blueberries fruit on mature wood in summer, but the unique nature of this variety yields an additional fall crop. Ripens in early July and fall crop ripens in October

Pink Icing Beautiful spring and fall foliage in shades of pink mixed with turquoise followed by autumn lavender. Compact plant bears loose clusters of sweet berries

Southern Highbush Varieties

O'Neal: Large, light blue, very sweet fruit of terrific quality. Best flavor of the southern highbush. Upright to 6 feet. Ripens early season. (300-400 hours) **Self-fertile**

Half-High Varieties

Bred for cold hardiness and compact shape with an average size of 3 feet, depending on variety.

Northsky: Small to medium, light blue fruit. Excellent wild blueberry flavor that is superior to most highbush varieties. Red fall color. Ripens July.

Northcountry: Medium size sky blue fruit with a mild and sweet wild blueberry flavor. Good quality. Ripens July.

Northblue: Plump, sweet, and firm navy blue fruit. Very good quality with a wild blueberry flavor. With refrigeration will store well. Red fall color. Ripens July.