

Growing Blueberries

We grow blueberries for every hardiness zone: Northern for zones 4-7, Southern for zones 6-9, and Rabbiteye for zones 8-9. Choose the correct variety for your location, **make sure to include more than one variety for proper pollinization**, and follow these simple practices for years of fresh blueberries.

- * **Choose a location:** Blueberries prefer full sunlight for best fruit production, but will grow in 50% shade.
- * **To plant:** Once a location is chosen, dig a hole twice as wide and the same depth as your root ball. Gently loosen the roots and place in the hole. Combine the existing soil with sphagnum peat moss and fill the hole so that settled soil will leave the plant at the same level at which it was in the pot. Soil must be extremely well-drained. Plant in raised areas if there is any chance of water standing around the roots.
- * **Watering:** Water plants immediately after planting and through dry periods. It is a good idea to lay a soaker hose or dripline along the plants before mulching.
- * **Fertilizing:** Blueberries require an acid soil (4.8 to 5.2 pH). You may use any fertilizer intended for acid-loving plants, but a time-release complete product is best. Place 5 to 15 ounces over the root zone at the beginning of the growing season. Never add manure; it is alkaline.
- * **Pruning:** Our plants require no initial pruning and will fruit during the first season from existing shoots produced during the previous growing season. Berries are borne on buds of last year's wood so light pruning is done to remove older and weaker wood. Blueberries should be pruned during the winter while the bushes are dormant. In winter, flower buds are easily visible on one-year-old wood.
- * **Mulch:** Mulch the plants heavily, to about 6 inches, to maintain a good moisture level and to reduce weed competition.

Edible Landscaping

Edible landscaping, simply put, replaces plants that are strictly ornamental with plants that produce food, allowing you to create a multi-functional landscape providing returns (fruits, berries, etc.) on your investment of water, fertilizer, and time. And let's face it, adding a plant to the landscape that only offers one season of interest or one function in the garden is a luxury on today's smaller home lots. With blueberries you can add not only a home fruit source, but beauty and function as well. Blueberries make excellent hedges. To form solid hedges or a screen, place plants 1/2 to 3' apart. For tall hedges use the faster growing, upright varieties, for shorter ones use more compact varieties. Blueberries offer lovely spring blossoms with white bells similar to those of *Pieris japonica*. They also develop striking fall foliage. Red hues from burgundy to flame, as well as bright yellow oranges, add rich color to the landscape. In the winter, depending on the variety, blueberries have brilliant stem color, some in shades of red, others in yellow.

And that's just the beginning. Here are some additional benefits:

- **Improved Taste and Nutrition:** Nutrients and flavor in most plants are highest immediately after harvest. What could be better for you than fresh-off-the-bush blueberries?
- **Increased Food Security:** An edible landscape reduces your dependence on foreign food sources which have unknown production systems.
- **Reduced Food Costs:** Certain foods are more economical to grow at home than to purchase.
- **Convenience:** Having fruits right outside the door will encourage you to add fresher, healthier foods to your diet—a terrific inducement for your children to enjoy them.
- **Fun and Exercise:** Growing your own crops is rewarding and fun! The exercise you get in the process can help you stay fit.
- **Sustainability:** Consuming locally grown produce can be an important part of reducing energy inputs and protecting our environment..



Blueberries

Virginia Berry Farm

www.virginiaberryfarm.com

Northern Varieties Zones 4-7

- **Patriot** is an early season variety of blueberry that can endure temperatures as low as -40 degrees. It is excellent in the landscape with its display of showy white blooms in spring, and brilliant orange-red fall color. All this, coupled with large, tasty fruit, make it an ideal addition to the home landscape. Matures 3-5'.
- **Duke** is an understandably popular early season variety. It blooms late, but ripens early which protects the blossoms from spring frosts, guaranteeing that it will produce heavily. Its light blue, medium-sized, mildly sweet fruit is ideal for eating fresh. Matures 4-6'.
- **Bluejay** is an early to mid-season blueberry that produces long loose clusters of light blue fruit that hang on the bush for long periods without affecting their quality. An excellent choice for freezing, pies, or canning. Good landscaping characteristics include light green leaves that turn orange-yellow in fall and bright yellow winter stems. Matures 6-7'.
- **Bluehaven** is an early to mid-season variety with light blue berries. A good partner for Patriot. Displays wonderful fall color. Matures 4'.
- **Bluecrop** is perhaps the most widely planted variety in the U.S. This mid-season variety is a true garden performer, consistently producing quantities of large, firm, sweet fruit. Matures 4-6'.
- **Blueray** is an old favorite, tolerating hot summers and very cold winters. This mid-season fruiter bears beautiful rosy pink flowers that turn bright white followed by a long fruiting season of large bright blue berries of delicious desert quality. Foliage is bright red & yellow in fall. Matures 4-6'.
- **Bluegold** is a mid to late season variety. Its bright-white blooms, yellow fall foliage and golden yellow winter wood make this an ideal landscape candidate. The sweet, sky blue berries borne in large clusters make it a wonderful garden addition. Matures 4-5'.
- **Jersey** is one of the oldest & most widely grown. This late season variety reliably produces heavy crops of sweet, small-medium berries year after year. A favorite for baking. Matures 6-8'.
- **Elliott** is a very late season variety that extends the berry season and offers bright burgundy-colored wood, deep red fall foliage, and tangy, small to medium, sky blue berries. Matures 5-7'.

Southern Varieties Zones 5-9

- **O'Neal** is a very early season variety considered by many to offer the best flavor of all Southern Highbush blueberries. This self-fertile bush bears attractive, large, very sweet fruit, followed by orange & wine colored fall foliage and red stems. Berry quality does not deteriorate under high temperatures. Matures 4-6'.
- **Misty** is attractive, vigorous and high-yielding. In fact many growers rate Misty the number one plant for yield, flavor and fruit quality. This early season fruiter is a good landscape choice. The blue-green foliage is a perfect foil for the pink and white spring flowers. The medium-sized sky blue fruit are sweetly delicious. Yields are best when it is planted with other varieties. Matures 4-6'.
- **Jubilee** has proven itself to be a consistent performer in heavier soils, summer heat, and sudden winter cold. This self-fertile, early-season plant produces medium-sized, sweet, sky blue berries that are borne in large clusters that ripen over a two week period. Matures 5-6'.
- **Sunshine Blue** is the ultimate edible ornamental. Beginning mid-season it produces dark blue fruit over a long season. New leaves are sky blue maturing to blue gray, a great foil for the beautiful pink flowers. This semi-evergreen, self-fertile shrub is well suited for patio or container gardens. Matures 3-4'.
- **Blueridge** is an early to mid-season variety that bears large, firm, light blue fruit on a vigorous, productive, upright plant.

Rabbiteye Varieties Zones 7-9

- **Climax** is an early-season variety that produces large, very good quality fruit. The sweet berries are good used fresh or processed. Matures 6-10'.
- **Premier** is an early to mid-season variety (2-3 weeks earlier than Tifblue) with light blue, excellent dessert quality fruit.
- **Tifblue** is a mid to late season variety that produces large, light blue, firm, full-flavored, good quality berries. More cold hardy than other Rabbiteye varieties. Self-fertile. Matures 8-16'.

Goundcover Varieties

- **Lowbush** is a native plant that, as the name implies, is shorter than its Highbush cousins, spreading by means of underground stems. Prolific white blooms yield small light blue berries. Zones 3-7.
- **Top Hat** is a self-fertile blueberry. It bears plentiful white blooms followed by light blue, pea-sized berries. Perfect for border plantings & containers alike. Zones: 3-7.
- **Well's Delight** is a versatile, evergreen groundcover that will tolerate heavy shade. Although its fruits resemble other blueberries they are "just for the birds."

Anti-oxidants and Health

Want to retain your memory? Try a blueberry. Lower your risk factors for some cancers? Make blueberries part of your diet. How about a great natural source of antioxidants for optimum health? That's right, blueberries.

There's been a lot in the news lately about the health benefits of blueberries. They are nature's number one source of antioxidants among fresh fruits and vegetables according to the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging. Antioxidants are phytochemicals that help neutralize harmful byproducts of metabolism called free radicals that are believed to be the threat that initiates disease problems. The antioxidants are believed to be important in preventing cancer, stroke, heart disease, and loss of memory resulting from Alzheimer's disease.

Chemically active pigments found in blueberries can improve failing eyesight and can prevent macular disintegration resulting from aging, as well as fighting urinary tract infections according to the New England Journal of Medicine.

The North American Blueberry Council says that blueberry juice has higher concentrations of antioxidants than any of the 40 juices tested. Other health benefits from blueberries are Vitamin A, Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, Vitamin C, Niacin, and the minerals calcium, phosphorus, potassium, and iron.

All that in just one deliciously sweet blue morsel. So enjoy. Here's to your health!

