

Blueberries

Popular and tasty; the most common fruits offered as "blueberries" and are native to North America (commercially cultivated highbush blueberries were not introduced into Europe until the 1930s).

CHOOSING A SITE

Blueberries should be planted in a sunny open spot, away from shade trees or hedges, which can rob their shallow roots of adequate moisture. They require acid soils (pH 4.5 - 5.5) rich in organic matter. Where soils are heavy, or are subject to drying, a 10cm to 20cm (4" to 8") mulch of sawdust, peatmoss, shredded oak leaves or pine needles can be applied.

SPACING

As a general rule, blueberries should be planted 1.5m (5') apart with 2m (6.5') between the rows. Late season apples will not pollinate early apples and vice-versa.

PLANTING

It is best to plant in early spring before growth starts. Damaged roots and about 1/3 of the top growth should be removed before planting. Bear in mind that blueberries do not have many fine root hairs and have shallow, underdeveloped roots concentrated in the top 35cm (14") of soil. As a result, regular watering and thick mulch are critical to establishing a healthy plant.

FERTILIZER

Unlike many fruiting plants, blueberries prefer a balanced fertilizer. Feed with **GARDENWORKS™** All-purpose 6-8-6 Fertilizer in March. For organic gardeners, be sure to add blood meal, fish emulsion or cottonseed meal to the soil early in spring. These 3 natural soil additives are rich in nitrogen, and will help the plants produce strong new growth. Because blueberries have shallow fibrous roots, fertilizers should not be applied close to the main stem of the plant. Place fertilizer around the plant from the edge of the drip line to no closer than 20cm (8") from the outer canes.

POLLINATION

All blueberries require cross-pollination. Any two varieties will pollinate one another, regardless of harvesting season.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Few insects and diseases bother blueberries. The blueberry maggot and fruit fly are unlikely to find a small backyard planting, but birds may. Protect your berries against birds by covering the plants with netting well before the berries begin to ripen.

PRUNING

Plants less than 5 years old require little pruning other than to remove weak growth and shape the bush. Blueberries fruit near the tips of 2 year and older branches. From the sixth year on, 1-2 of the oldest canes should be removed each year. These should be cut off at ground level. Thin the bush to allow light into the interior of the plant and aid in air circulation. Start thinning with the most undesirable, weak stems. Summer pinching of new growth will produce compact plants.

HARVEST

In the first four years, highbush blueberry plants will produce small crops. From the fifth year on about 2-5kg (4.4-11lb) per bush may be expected. The harvest season extends from mid-July for early varieties to September for late varieties. The cropping/harvesting period for any one variety is about six weeks. Blueberries mature about 50-60 days from pollination.

Varieties

Early-season

(ripens early to mid-June)

Blue Jay: Excellent quality, light blue, medium-large fruit in an open loose cluster. Mild flavour. Extremely vigorous.

Duke: Plants are vigorous, upright, and consistently productive. Berries are medium sized and firm.

Northland: A very hardy variety for colder regions. Medium sized, round, fruit. Moderately firm and medium blue. The flavour is good. Spreading plant, reaching 4' at maturity.

Patriot: Early, large berry with good flavour. Upright plant reaches 1.2m to 1.8m (4' to 6') in height. Very winter hardy.

Mid-season

(ripens early to mid-July)

Bluecrop: Recommended in all areas. Large, light blue fruit. Rather tart but an excellent keeper and good in cooking. The plant is upright and medium hardy.

Rancocas: Tall, erect, open arching habit. Excellent shrub. Leaves smaller than most. Needs heavy pruning. Berries mild and sweet. Dependable old-timer.

Late-season

(ripens late July into August)

Dixi: Not as an attractive plant as others - tall and open. Needs heavy pruning. Berries among largest and tastiest, are medium blue, firm and sweet.



GARDENWORKS™
Everything to Make Your Garden Work!