



Growing Blueberries

BLUEBERRY BASICS

A plant native to North America, the Blueberry is almost the perfect fruit: beautiful, ornamental, easy to grow and contains a high concentration of antioxidants.

Soil

The trick to growing blueberries is good soil. With a little bit of attention to proper soil conditions blueberries will thrive in the landscape and especially in containers - where you can really control the soil conditions. Blueberries like well drained acidic soils. They prefer a low pH of 4.5 to 6.0 with 5.5 being optimal. They also like to grow in actively decomposing organic matter. To help ensure these optimal soil traits in your garden we have developed our own Orchard Blueberry Soil Mix (see inset for more information).

The Perfect Blueberry Soil Mix:

⅓ part Micro Bark

⅓ part Acid Mix (Azalea, Camellia, Gardenia Planting Mix)

⅓ part Gold Rush or Black Forest compost

Mix together and add 2 tablespoons of Soil Sulfur or FST per plant.

Exposure

In hotter climates, such as Lafayette and the rest of Contra Costa County, blueberries prefer morning sun and afternoon shade. While in cooler climates, such as Alameda County, blueberries will prefer sun all day.

CHOOSING BLUEBERRIES

Chill Hours

Many varieties of fruiting plants need a specific length of time in dormancy - essentially, in temperatures below 45 degrees - in order to set fruit. Highbush varieties are categorized into two groups based on their chill requirement:

Northern Highbush, "High Chill" varieties that require:

800-1000 Chill Hours

Southern Highbush, "Low Chill" varieties that require:

150-800 Chill Hours

It is important to note our local chill hours which are:

Contra Costa County averages:

700-1000 Chill Hours

Alameda County averages:

400-700 Chill Hours

This means that Northern Highbush varieties should only be grown in Contra Costa or similar counties. Southern Highbush, on the other hand, can be grown in Alameda or Contra Costa - it is perfectly fine for plants to receive more chill hours than needed to set fruit.

For more information on local chilling hours go to: http://fruitsandnuts.ucdavis.edu/Weather_Services/chilling_accumulation_models/

Fertilizer

In spring, use an organic fertilizer high in nitrogen and minor nutrients such as **E.B. Stone Cottonseed Meal** or **Garden Elements Rhody, Azalea & Holly Food**. Typically you will want to fertilize once at the beginning of spring and again 6 weeks later, but be sure to check the specific directions of the fertilizer you purchase. If you decide to go with a traditional fertilizer, do check its ingredients carefully as the Nitrogen must not be from Nitrate, which can be deadly to blueberries.

Pruning

Pruning is important for a blueberry's overall health, appearance and fruit production. When pruning keep in mind the following:

- Minimize or restrict fruiting in years 1-3 to encourage vegetative development.
- Maintain a balance between vegetative growth, root development and flowering/fruit set.
- Develop the overall plant shape; encourage upright growth, strong canes and an open central canopy.
- Thin out excess flowering and fruiting to improve fruit size and quality.

After your blueberry planting comes into production in year three, it is still important to prune once or twice a year. This will open the canopy of the plant to allow light and ventilation to reach the inside of the plant. This will encourage fruiting in the inner part of the plant and reduce occurrences of foliar diseases. It is also important to eliminate smaller, horizontal branches which produce few fruit and are more difficult to pick.

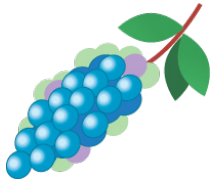
Early, Mid and Late Fruiting

Different blueberry varieties ripen at different times throughout the fruiting season - for our area, anywhere between May and early July. You will typically find varieties labeled as early-season, mid-season or late-season. We always recommend that home gardeners choose varieties with different fruiting times to ensure a longer harvest. Blueberries produce more fruit when planted near different varieties so why not take the opportunity to also extend the harvest?

Plant Characteristics















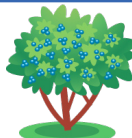





It can be tough trying to pick out "the best" blueberry varieties. Just remember they all make beautiful shrubs and produce delicious berries; you really can't make a wrong choice. That being said, every variety is different in some subtle way. The following charts will help identify those key differences as well as each variety's "Outstanding Characteristic". Keep in mind that just because a variety exemplifies one of these characteristics does not mean that it won't exhibit the others.

Especially Delicious Berries | **Heavy Fruit Yield** | **Great for Containers** | **Strong Landscape Qualities** | **Perfect for Baking**



BLUEBERRY VARIETIES

SOUTHERN Highbush

VARIETY	CHILL HOURS	SEASON	SIZE	FLAVOR	MATURE SIZE & SHAPE	FALL COLOR	OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS
Bountiful Blue	150 Chill Hours	 Mid-Late		Sweet & Juicy		 Red, Burgundy	
By far our most popular variety and rightfully so. Bountiful Blue has a compact form and is known for having the bluest foliage of any variety. It has white springtime blooms with a pink blush. It also produces good quantities of delicious, large, sky-blue berries that are especially sweet and flavorful. Just an all around great blueberry.							
Jubilee	500 Chill Hours	 Mid		Fresh, Sweet		 Yellow-orange, Burgundy	
This variety was developed in Mississippi, which is known for its tough blueberry-growing conditions. It performs well in heavier soils and through summer heat and sudden winter cold. Jubilee has bountiful crops of especially delicious sky blue berries that grow in large clusters.							
Misty	300 Chill Hours	 Early		Spicy, Sweet		 Blue-Green, Burgundy	
One of our more popular and most attractive varieties. Misty is vigorous and high yielding with the ability to tolerate relatively hot summers. The bright blue-green foliage is a perfect contrast to the pink and white spring flowers and the sky blue summer fruit.							
O'Neal	400 Chill Hours	 Early		Juicy, Sweet		 Orange, Burgundy	
Considered by some to have the best flavor of all the Southern Highbush varieties. O'Neal has attractive gray-green foliage accented with red stems and branches. Perhaps a little more so than the other varieties, it is important to maintain a correct soil pH of 4.5-5.5 in order to have success with O'Neal.							

VARIETY	CHILL HOURS	SEASON	SIZE	FLAVOR	MATURE SIZE & SHAPE	FALL COLOR	OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS
Sharpblue	200 Chill Hours	 Early		Abundant, Robust	 5-6 Ft Spreading, Upright	 Green	
<p>Sharpblue is the leading and most adaptable variety for low chill areas throughout the world. Sharpblue can bloom and fruit almost year round with nearly evergreen foliage. This blueberry is certainly a top choice for areas with mild winters where frosts are uncommon.</p>							

Southmoon	400 Chill Hours	 Mid-Late		Complex, Robust	 5-6 Ft Upright, Vigorous	 Green	
<p>Known for producing exceptional berries that are very firm and have an excellent balance of high sweetness and high acidity. Southmoon serves as a great companion/pollinator for most cultivars and performs especially well in lighter, sandy soils with generous amounts of organic matter.</p>							

Sunshine Blue	150 Chill Hours	 Mid-Late		Rich, Sweet	 3 Ft Compact, Upright	 Blue-Green, Burgundy	
<p>Great for gardens from San Diego to Seattle, this little variety can do it all. Sunshine Blue is a semi-dwarf (only about 3'), versatile evergreen blueberry. It features showy hot pink flowers that fade to white in the spring, yielding large berries later on in the summer. Sunshine Blue can tolerate a wider range of soil pH than most varieties and while it has one of the smallest chilling requirements (150 hours), it is surprisingly cold-hardy as well.</p>							

NORTHERN Highbush

Bluecrop	800 Chill Hours	 Mid		Classic, Sweet	 4-6 Ft Open, Upright	 Red	
<p>A "berry-of-all-trades", known for its adaptability, long bearing season, high fruit yield and disease resistance. So consistent that it is the leading commercial variety in North America. If you want a proven strong performer look no further than Bluecrop.</p>							

Blueray	800 Chill Hours	 Mid		Classic, Fresh	 4-6 Ft Open, Upright	 Yellow, Red	
<p>An old favorite and versatile variety, Blueray does particularly well in areas with hot summers or very cold winters. Produces excellent quality berries with a sweet, slightly tart, aromatic flavor. Rosy pink flowers turn bright white when in full bloom. Has distinctly red wood that shows off in the winter.</p>							

Chandler	900 Chill Hours	 Mid-Late		Full, Robust	 5-7 Ft Slightly Spreading	 Orange, Burgundy	
<p>Chandler is famous for having the world's largest blueberry with berries the size of a quarter. Has a long, 6-week ripening season ensuring a steady supply of large delicious berries over a longer period of time. Foliage turns to a beautiful mix of orange and wine-red in the fall.</p>							

Darrow	800 Chill Hours	 Late		Juicy, Robust	 4-6 Ft Upright	 Orange, Red	
<p>Prolific blooms in spring that lead to decent yields in the summer. Darrow berries are known for being one of the largest and most delicious berries one can grow. The berries are slightly flat, light blue with a delightfully tart flavor.</p>							

NORTHERN Highbush

Variety	Chill Hours	Season	Size	Flavor	Mature Size & Shape	Fall Color	Outstanding Characteristics
Duke	900 Chill Hours	 Early		Savory, Sweet	 4-6Ft Stocky, Upright	 Yellow, Orange	
<p>Duke is the most widely planted early ripening northern variety and for good reason. It is a heavy, consistent producer with a large, firm high quality berry, great for eating and in jams. Duke typically blooms late and ripens early, protecting the blossoms from any potential spring frosts in colder areas. The large yields often bow the branches prompting many gardeners to use a trellis as support.</p>							

Jersey	800 Chill Hours	 Late		Lush, Sweet	 6-8Ft Upright	 Orange	
<p>One of the oldest and most widely grown of all varieties, Jersey is a favorite for home gardeners who want an easy to grow bush. This variety tolerates a wide range of soil types and is especially cold-hardy making it a plant that will last through the years. Although the berries are not as large as some of the others, Jersey is praised for producing an abundance of distinctly sweet and flavorful berries, perfect for baking.</p>							

Northland	800 Chill Hours	 Early-Mid		Fresh, Sweet	 4-7Ft Spreading, Upright	 Yellow, Orange	
<p>Bred and developed over 50 years ago at Michigan State University to be the most cold-hardy blueberry variety. Northland is easy to grow and adaptable to many different soil types. The berries are excellent for jams and baking because of their high sugar content and are known for their amazing flavor with characteristics that are more akin to the wild lowbush species than the other highbushes.</p>							

Patriot	950 Chill Hours	 Early		Delicate, Sweet	 3-5Ft Open, Spreading	 Yellow, Orange, Red	
<p>A great cold-hardy variety that bears consistent crops even in wetter soils. Has one of the most low and spreading forms of any Northern Highbush. Patriot has excellent ornamental qualities with its showy white blooms in spring, dark-green summer foliage and fiery orange-red fall colors, making it great in the landscape and in containers.</p>							

Spartan	800 Chill Hours	 Early		Robust, Fruity	 4-6Ft Upright	 Yellow, Orange	
<p>Spartan is an easy to pick upright bush which features one of the most attractive and best flavored berries of any cultivar, making it a favorite at farmers markets as well as in the home garden. It is an old time variety, developed in New Jersey in the 1960's and has the largest early-season berry. Spartan is particular about its soil type, requiring light, well-drained soil with an abundance of organic matter.</p>							

Half-Highs (Crossed between the Northern Highbush and wild Lowbush varieties)

Northblue Half-High	900 Chill Hours	 Mid		Juicy, Wild	 3-4 Ft Open, Upright	 Red, Burgundy	
<p>Northblue is a great landscape plant and a proven producer of quality fruit in cold climates. The berries have that distinctly "wild" flavor common to the half-highs and are excellent for baking or eating fresh. This bush is an excellent cold-hardy variety with high yields and a great form.</p>							

Northsky Half-High	900 Chill Hours	 Mid		Fresh, Sweet	 1-2Ft Low Spreading	 Yellow, Orange, Red	
<p>Here is a short, extremely hardy blueberry that produces even after the hardest of winters. Has a show of snowy white flowers in spring followed later by varied and vibrant foliage in the fall. Northsky is an especially great choice for containers and in colder regions such as Tahoe.</p>							