

Blueberries are deciduous (mostly) fruiting shrubs with ornamental fall foliage color. Many even offer colorful winter bark. They make handsome plants for a hedge or border and are easily incorporated into the landscape. Most varieties grow about 4-6 feet tall; some have a more erect habit and others are more spreading. Compact varieties are also available. Plant 3 feet apart for an informal hedge, 4 to 5 feet apart otherwise. Several of the smaller varieties do well in containers on decks or patios, and the Patio series has been bred to thrive in those conditions. However, remember that plants in containers are more exposed to extremes than the same plant in the ground: they will warm up faster, freeze sooner, and dry out more quickly. So adjust your watering and cultural practices to compensate for that.

Blueberries thrive in conditions that suit rhododendrons and azaleas. They need full sun and cool, moist soil that drains well. Blueberries are very shallow-rooted; be careful not to cultivate deeply around their bases. Weeds, lack of ample water, and birds will limit yields. Mulching with compost or bark will limit competition from weeds and conserve moisture. A light mulch at planting time, increased to a depth of 6 inches over a period of years, is ideal. On hot days blueberries will use about 2 gallons of water per plant. Too much fluctuation between dry and wet soil is the worst thing for blueberries.

Do not prune until the plants are 3 to 4 years old. This allows the plant to build strength and make maximum growth. Fruit buds for the following year are produced on new shoots. Removing old branches forces this new growth, thus assuring adequate and vigorous fruiting wood. Pruning in general will tend to reduce the number of berries but will increase their size and speed their maturation. Prune during the dormant season. On older bushes, remove a few older canes or cut them back to a strong lateral (side branch). Remove low spreading branches near the ground, as berries on them get dirty easily. Thin the shorter, weaker fruiting twigs on varieties that produce too many fruit buds.

Most varieties of blueberries are not self-fertile. That means a plant's flowers can't be pollinated by its own pollen (or by the pollen from a clone, i.e. another plant of the same blueberry variety), so you need to plant two different varieties to ensure fruit set. Any two varieties will cross-pollinate regardless of ripening time. A few varieties are self-fertile, as noted in the variety descriptions. With self-fertile plants, you will get decent fruit production from a single plant, but fruit set will often be heavier with cross-pollination. With young plants especially, overproduction can sometimes be a problem. Thinning the blossoms or green berries may promote larger fruit and a healthier bush.

Fertilizing blueberries is governed by the length of the new shoot growth on mature canes. Plants that make little or no shoot growth should be fertilized. Plants that make 1 foot or more of new shoot growth need little or no fertilizer. If growth is slow, use an organic rhododendron food around mid-March at the rate recommended for that size shrub. Exercise caution when fertilizing young plants (1 to 2 years old) because fertilizer can damage their roots.

Fruit will mature between July 1 and October 1, depending on the variety. Berries are produced in clusters and ripen in succession over a period of time before full maturity of flavor is reached. Try to delay picking until a fair quantity of berries acquires full size and flavor. They will become sweeter the longer they hang on the bush. Put netting over the bushes if birds become a problem. You can expect 5 or more pounds of fruit per mature large highbush plant. Varieties differ as to the size of the scar when you pick the berry (the small puckered area at the top of the berry where you pluck it off the stem). The smaller the scar, the better the berry will keep under refrigeration or freezing. Scar size does not affect the berry flavor.

Mummyberry can sometimes be a problem; it kills blossoms and shrivels berries. Destroy all affected fruit and clean up leaves around plants each fall.

Blueberries are extremely healthy fruit. One serving (1/2 cup) of blueberries has only 43 calories—but it provides 8% of the RDI for fiber, 16% for Vitamin C, and more antioxidants than five servings of most other fruits or vegetables. Regular consumption of blueberries has been linked to improved eye sight, lower cholesterol, improved urinary tract health, and the reduction of various problems associated with aging, including improved memory and motor skills, reduced skin wrinkles, and the alleviation of arthritis pain.

NORTHERN Highbush & HALF-HIGH VARIETIES

Bluecrop Midseason. Medium to large, loose clusters of large, firm, crack-resistant, light blue fruit. Small scar. High quality fruit with sweet, classic flavor. Good for fresh eating, preserves, baking and freezing. Vigorous, upright growth will reach 4 to 6 feet at maturity. Tends to overbear. Good disease resistance. Orange to red fall color; light red bark in winter.

Bountiful Delight Midseason. Big clusters of small sweet aromatic berries. Compact ornamental plant; foliage emerges bright red, turning glossy green. Tolerates hot summers.

Cabernet Splash Midseason. Medium size flavorful fruit. Grows to about 4 feet tall and wide. Plant is highly ornamental: new foliage is glossy cabernet red, turning to shades of green and wine in summer. Fiery red fall foliage.

Chandler Mid to late season. Extremely large fruit with sweet full flavor. High in antioxidants. Extended ripening season of up to six weeks, providing a good supply of berries for fresh eating. Vigorous grower, slightly spreading habit to 5 to 6 feet tall. Bright red fall color.

Chippewa Midseason. Large, sweet, light blue fruit. Very good quality fruit with excellent flavor. Compact bush 3 to 4 feet tall and wide; fiery red fall foliage. Very cold hardy.

Darrow Late season. Very heavy production of very large, tart, flavorful, light blue berries. High in antioxidants. Plants are 6-8' tall, very vigorous, upright. Orange to scarlet fall color.

Draper Early midseason. Large, powder blue, flavorful fruit; very firm and juicy. Berry harvest is concentrated; berries last well once picked. Compact plant, about 4-5 feet. Bred at Michigan State University; tolerates cold winters. Yellow fall foliage.

Duke Early season. Large size light blue berries with sweet-tart flavor. Small scar. Very firm, retains freshness longer than other varieties. Blooms late but ripens early. Heavy, consistent producer. Fall foliage shades of yellow, orange, and red.

Earliblue Very early season; often the first to ripen! Medium-large, firm, light blue fruit in long, loose clusters. Resists cracking. Medium scar. Good dessert quality—sweet, aromatic flavor. Good cling. Vigorous, erect growth habit to 4 to 6 feet tall. Red to burgundy fall color and bright red bark in winter.

Elliott Very late season. Can continue bearing well into September! Heavy producer of sky blue fruit, high in antioxidants. Tart flavor if not picked when fully ripe. Vigorous growth to 5 to 7 feet tall. Burgundy bark in winter.

Jersey Late season. Easy to grow and productive variety. Old favorite of home gardeners for its dark blue, small to medium sized, very sweet and aromatic fruit. Excellent for pies and preserves! Very large bush can reach 6-8' at maturity. Yellow fall color; yellow bark in winter.

Legacy Midseason. Large light blue fruit with robust flavor. Rated one of the best in USDA trials. Vigorous and very productive, growing 4 to 6 feet tall at maturity. Bright orange fall foliage; may be evergreen in mild winters.

Liberty Late season. Very heavy production of large berries with nice balanced sweet-tart flavor makes this a favorite. 6-8' tall, very vigorous. Bright red to orange fall color.

Patriot Early season. Dark blue, large, highly flavored berries. Let ripen fully for best sweetness. Small scar. Low growing, spreading to 4 feet. Fiery orange fall color. Very cold hardy.

Pink Lemonade Mid to late season. Firm, sweet fruit is bright pink when ripe—very unusual, but with true blueberry flavor. 5-6 foot plant is highly ornamental, with a vigorous upright form, glossy foliage, pinkish-white flowers in spring and the distinctive pink berries in the summer. Fall foliage is golden to orange; winter twigs are reddish. Self-fertile.

Razz Mid season. Medium to large, plump, powder blue berries are sweet-tart with *raspberry* overtones to the flavor! Good producer. 4-6' tall, Bright red to orange fall color. Self-fertile.

Reka Early season. Medium to large size dark blue berries. Tart and flavorful. Bred in New Zealand; the vigorous plant is tolerant of a wide range of soil types. Burgundy fall color.

Spartan Early. One of the most attractive and best-flavored berries. Light blue, very large fruit has a tangy, sweet, delicious flavor. Plant requires well-draining soil with lots of organic matter. Upright bush to 5-6 feet. Orange-yellow fall color.

Sweetheart Early season and late season—Sweetheart will rebloom and produce a light autumn crop if the weather permits. Heavy yields of sweet, firm, flavorful light blue fruit; a mature plant can produce 15 pounds of fruit. Sweetheart is a cross between northern and southern varieties. Grows to 6 feet by 4 feet. Partially self-fertile, but will produce more with cross-pollination.

Top Hat Midseason. The pea size, firm, light blue fruit has wild blueberry flavor. Dwarf nicely-shaped plant growing 1½ feet tall and wide. Excellent for containers and bonsai. Yellow to orange fall color

SOUTHERN Highbush & Lowbush Varieties

The southern highbush and lowbush varieties have been bred for good fruit production with lower winter chilling requirements. All southern highbush varieties carried by Sky are self-fertile; most are evergreen or semi-evergreen.

Bountiful Blue Midseason. Big clusters of large sweet fruit. Semi dwarf grows to 3 feet high and 4 wide. Semi-evergreen foliage is gorgeous blue-green.

Sunshine Blue Midseason. Dime size sweet and slightly tangy fruit—produced for up to 9 weeks. Semi dwarf, compact grower to 3 feet. Hot pink flowers fade to white. Semi-evergreen. Ornamental and productive.

Patio (Bushel and Berry) Varieties

The Bushel and Barrel line of berries has been bred to be productive and ornamental in moderate-sized containers or small spaces. As with the southern highbush blueberries, these varieties are self-fertile and have a long ripening season.

Midnight Cascade Midseason. Medium sized, very dark berries are sweet with a hint of vanilla flavor. This variety is most notable for its compact, trailing habit: it grows 18-24" tall and then trails. It's excellent in a hanging basket, deck rail planter, or even planted to trail over a rock wall. Deciduous; summer foliage is glossy green, fall color is red. The white spring flowers complete its claim to be as ornamental as delicious!

Pink Icing Midseason. Unlike 'Pink Lemonade,' this variety is named for its foliage, not its large, sweet, juicy blue berries. New growth emerges lovely pink blended with shades of blue and green, then turns glossy green as the foliage matures. This compact (3-4') and attractive plant will be evergreen in mild winters, and the cold turns its foliage a turquoise blue!

Sapphire Cascade Midseason. Medium sized, dark blue berries with a nice "bloom" and a sweet classic flavor. Like its sister 'Midnight Cascade', it grows 18-24" tall and then trails. It's excellent in a hanging basket, deck rail planter, or even planted to trail over a rock wall. It's semi-evergreen, with red-tinged foliage through the cold months.