

Gray Barn Green Thumb Guide



Blueberries



Nutritious, delicious, and easy to grow are three words that describe blueberries. Varieties can feature large fruit (best for eating fresh and in desserts) or small fruit (good in muffins and pancakes). Fruit ripens at different times, so it is possible with the right combination of plants to have fresh berries from mid-summer into the autumn. Fall gives blueberry growers an extra bonus when the leaves change color to brilliant reds, yellows and oranges. For blueberry lovers, allow at least two plants per family member.

Planting: Select a sunny location in well-drained, very acidic soil, rich in organic matter. A fail-safe way to grow blueberries in almost any soil is to incorporate peat moss at the time of planting. Remove about ½ the soil from the planting area and replace it with an equal amount of pre-moistened peat moss. Mix well and after planting, water well. If growing space is limited, plant in containers with smaller varieties such as Northsky, Top Hat or Sunshine Blue.

Spacing: Blueberries can be planted as close as 2-2 ½ feet apart to form solid hedgerows or spaced farther apart and grown individually.

Mulching: Blueberries do best with 2-3 inches of mulch to conserve moisture, prevent weeds and add organic material to the soil. Bark, compost, and sawdust are all effective mulches. Renew mulch every two years.

Fertilizing: Blueberries do well with fertilizers for acid-loving plants, like a Rhododendron and Azalea formula. For newly planted stock use 2 Tbsp. of 10-20-10 in late spring, or once plants are established. Use with care as blueberries are very sensitive to over fertilization and always water well after fertilization. For organic fertilizers, blood meal and cottonseed meal work well. Avoid using fresh manure.

Pruning:

- Pruning is essential for consistent production of high-quality fruit. The best time to prune blueberries is from January to mid-March.
- Remove the low growth that would touch the ground when loaded with fruit. Cut out short, soft, new shoots that developed from the base of the plant in the late season.
- Remove canes and twigs damaged by winter injury, mechanical causes, diseases or insects.
- Cut out weak, twiggy wood from the top and outer parts of the plant. Remove enough from the top to let light down into the plant center.
- If necessary, cut out some (usually one or two) older canes. Cut out the weakest canes. Sometimes it is better to cut the cane back to a strong new side branch, rather than pruning it back to the ground.
- If your plants tend to overbear, thin the fruit buds by cutting back some of the small shoots carrying a heavy load of flower buds.

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Popular Northwest Blueberry Varieties

Early Season

- Bluejay:** Medium size berry, delicately sweet flavor, shrub 6-7 feet, upright, orange/red fall color.
- Duke:** Large berry, savory sweet flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, stocky upright, orange/yellow fall color.
- Reka:** Medium-large berry, excellent rich flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, upright vigorous, red/burgundy fall color.

Mid-Season

- Bluecrop:** Large berry, classic sweet flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, upright and open, red fall color.
- Burgundy:** Small berry, classic wild flavor, shrub 1-2 feet, spreading ground cover, burgundy fall color.
- Chandler:** Giant berry, full robust flavor, shrub 5-7 feet, slightly spreading, wine/orange fall color.
- Chippewa:** Medium berry, smoothly sweet flavor, shrub 3-4 feet, compact upright, red fall color.
- Rubel:** Small berry, subtle sweet flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, upright, fire red fall color.
- Top Hat:** Small berry, wild flavor, shrub 1-2 feet, globe shaped, yellow/orange fall color.
- Toro:** Large berry, mildly sweet flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, stocky upright, crimson/red/yellow fall color.

Late Season

- Elliott:** Medium-large berry, zesty flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, upright, red/orange fall color.
- Jersey:** Medium berry, lush, sweet flavor, shrub 6-8 feet, upright, orange flame fall color.
- Legacy:** Medium-large berry, uniquely robust flavor, shrub 4-6 feet, open spreading, crimson fall color.
- Sunshine Blue:** Medium size berry, rich sweet flavor, shrub 3 feet, upright compact, blue/green/burgundy fall color (semi-evergreen).

- Resources:** The Edible Garden, Sunset Publishing, 2005.
www.fallcreeknursery.com
www.blueberry.org