

A Variety of Varieties: Selecting Berries for your Backyard

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Berries are an excellent addition to most home gardens. Raspberries, blackberries, strawberries and blueberries grow well here, but there are many varieties. So, how do you choose?

Selection of berries should be based on how well the variety grows in our climate; personal preferences on flavor, color and size of fruit; and disease resistance. Growth habit and timing of fruit set are other major considerations. (See sidebar.)

Raspberries

The two major types of raspberries are *summer-bearing* and *fall-bearing*. Plants of both types live for many years but individual canes from these plants live for only 2 years. Summer-bearing raspberries produce fruit on 2-year old canes in June and July; those canes then die. Fall-bearing raspberries produce a small crop of berries at the top of 1-year old canes in late summer or fall. In June and July of the following year, they bear fruit on the lower portion of those same canes (now 2-year old canes) which then die. Summer-bearing raspberries tend to be more flavorful than fall-bearing raspberry varieties.

Blackberries

The three major types of blackberries are *trailing*, *erect*, and *semi-erect*. Trailing blackberries have lengthy canes that naturally trail along the ground and must be trained onto supports or trellises; their fruit has an aromatic flavor and small seeds. Erect blackberries have stiff canes and are self-supporting; their fruit has a slightly bitter after-taste (often called an “eastern” flavor) and large seeds. Semi-erect blackberries have stiffer canes but still need a trellis for support; their fruit has a milder flavor and large seeds. Erect varieties tend to be more winter hardy and take up less space. All three types of blackberries have thornless varieties that make trellising and harvesting easier.

Strawberries

Strawberry types include *June-bearers*, *everbearers*, and *day-neutrals*. June-bearers produce one crop of berries each year, in June and July. Everbearers (a bit of a misnomer) produce berries in June and again in late summer or early fall. Day-neutrals produce berries throughout the normal growing season but sometimes stop producing during hot weather. June-bearers typically have larger, more flavorful fruit than everbearers and day-neutrals. June-bearers produce more runners which can extend the typical 3-5 year life span of most strawberry plants.

Blueberries

The most common types of blueberries are Northern highbush and half-high. Northern highbush blueberries are large shrubs that produce well in our climate. Half-high blueberry bushes are smaller and less productive, but are well-suited for growing in containers. Onset of ripening among blueberry varieties ranges from the beginning of July to mid-September leading to the labels *early*, *midseason*, *late-midseason*, and *late*. Although relatively hardy, the earliest ripening varieties (which bloom earlier and could be damaged by late frosts) and the latest ripening varieties (which may not ripen because of cool temperatures) should be avoided at higher elevations. Blueberries are self-fruitful but will produce more and bigger berries if pollinated by a different blueberry variety.

Regardless of the berry type, if you plant varieties that ripen at different times, you can enjoy the taste of fresh berries for longer!

SIDE BAR

Selected varieties of berries that do well in Washington*			
Raspberries	Blackberry	Strawberries	Blueberries
<i>Summer-bearing</i>	<i>Trailing</i>	<i>June-bearers</i>	<i>Early</i>
Willamette	Cascade	Hood	Earliblue
Meeker	Marion	Shuksan	Spartan
Tulameen	Kotata	Totem	Patriot
Cascade Delight	Waldo	Puget Summer	<i>Midseason</i>
Cascade Dawn	Black Butte	Puget Reliance	Bluejay
Chilliwack	Silvan	Benton	Bluecrop
<i>Fall-bearing</i>	Siskyou	<i>Everbearers</i>	<i>Late-midseason</i>
Autumn Bliss	<i>Semi-erect</i>	Fort Laramie	Berkeley
Summit	Black satin	Ozark Beauty	Jersey
Heritage	Hull Thornless	Quinault	<i>Late</i>
Fall Gold	Triple Crown	<i>Day-neutrals</i>	Darrow
	Chester Thornless	Seascape	Elliott
	<i>Erect</i>	Tristar	
	Cherokee	Tribute	
	Arapaho		
	Shawnee		
	Navaho		

*For more information on growing berries of all kinds go to <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1640/eb1640.html>

For more FREE gardening help visit a local Master Gardener plant clinic. The clinics are held on Saturdays at the Woodcock Demonstration Garden, 2711 Woodcock Road in Sequim from 11 am to 3 pm through September and on Mondays at the Courthouse in Port Angeles from 9 am to 1 pm through October. Or call the plant clinic helpline at 360-417-2514.