

The Scoop on Blueberries

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Grow blueberries right in your own yard so you can pick this healthy fruit fresh off the shrub. Plant to suit their needs and they'll be easy care and a nice addition to the landscape.

- **Healthful**; antioxidants, pick a few every day or freeze for later. Prolong the fruiting season with early, mid & late season varieties.
- **Planting**: Most important to get this right and then they'll reward you. Get a soil test; best in acid soil with pH 4.5 to 5.5; Lower pH with garden sulfur, dusting sulfur: 1 to 1.5#/100 sq. ft., depending on soil test; Needs acid-type organic soil; add peat moss, well-rotted sawdust, compost dug in 6 to 8 inches deep. Plant in spring; need good drainage—raised beds or mounds work well. Pick off sets first year to allow plant to establish.
- **Full sun** or maybe light late afternoon shade.
- **Water** regularly; shallow roots dry out if not mulched well; need moisture during growing season.
- **Mulch**—shallow roots don't compete with other plants for nutrients so keep weed-free under the drip line; grass is OK between plants; Add mulch, a small layer at a time, of old sawdust, bark mulch, most any acid-type mulch. If not decomposed well, add nitrogen fertilizer to compensate.
- **Fertilizers**—late spring when buds start to swell use acid type (example: Rhododendron) 10-20-10 or similar, about 2 tablespoon/plant for newly planted ones. As plant matures, use up to 8 oz./plant early and/or late spring. Water well after fertilizing. Organic fertilizers include cottonseed meal & blood meal. Don't over fertilize. None after July 1.

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- Select **Hardy** cultivars rated Zone 5 or lower.
- **Cultivars:** Plant two varieties that bloom at same time for cross-pollination (yield larger and more fruit). Each cultivar ripens over a period of about one month.
- **Highbush** cultivars are the larger size shrubs. A few, listed early through late bearing: Earliblue, Spartan, Patriot, Collins, Blueray, Olympia, Toro, Bluecrop, Darrow, Lateblue.
- **Small-sized** ones are a cross between highbush & lowbush (very hardy, more wild blueberry taste): Northland (early); Northcountry (early-mid); Northsky, mid-late; Northblue (mid-late).
- **Shrub sizes** 6 to 8 ft. biggies down to low ones 2 to 3 ft. What's your available space? About two plants/each blueberry eater in your family. Spacing depends on plant size; best if you can walk between plants. (often 5 to 6 ft. apart).
- **Pests:** Birds – net, cage, streamers.
- **Diseases:** mummy berry.
- **Pollination;** encourage bees; mason bees.
- **Pruning;** late winter; open up center, cut drooping growth, crossed branches, remove older, grayer canes and twiggy growth; Target saving 12 to 16 canes at base on mature shrub. Much less pruning on immature shrubs.
- **Landscape plant:** Provide welcome fall color; small sizes fit in easily (2 to 3 ft); deciduous. Nice in larger containers, example: half whiskey barrels.

