

BLUEBERRIES

IN THE LANDSCAPE: *Vaccinium* species grow naturally throughout the eastern USA and have long been valued for their tasty fruit in summer. In summer foliage is dark green, sometimes with a bluish cast but turns to yellow, brilliant red, and orange foliage in the autumn, rivaling the invasive Burning Bush. Handsome yellow-green to reddish stems offer winter interest. And, when spring arrives again, they offer a profusion of white bell-shaped flowers.

SIZES: There are three types of blueberries distinguished from each other by their heights.

Highbush varieties (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) (HB): Standard “pick your own” selections, ripening from June through summer. Best grown in groups to maximize yield. Mature height is about 6’. Extremely cold hardy and mostly pest resistant. Hardy to zone 5 unless otherwise noted.

Half High varieties (HH): Developed at the University of Minnesota, these are distinctly compact with mature height in the 2-3’ range. Hardy to zone 5 unless otherwise noted.

Lowbush varieties (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) (LB): Densely branched native groundcover type with smallish blue fruits ripening in summer. Similar to highbush in cultural requirements. Hardy to zone 5 unless otherwise noted.

SPACING: Blueberries can be used both as a food plant and used as an ornamental in the landscape. When planted as an informal hedge, they should be placed 3-3.5’ on center. When used as a grouping in the landscape, they should be placed 4-5’ on center. This difference is due to the different pruning which they will receive in each situation.

REQUIREMENTS:

SOIL The most important factor in growing blueberries is the acidity of the soil. A pH range of 4.0-5.5 is best. New England soils are normally acidic, but it is wise to test the soil in the planting area. If the soil needs to be acidified, add ammonium sulfate fertilizer or cottonseed meal to the planting backfill mix.

Blueberries also need soil with plenty of organic matter and will not tolerate poorly drained or overly heavy soil conditions. Lean soils should be amended with compost, clay soils with plenty of peat moss.

MOISTURE Blueberries require uniform moisture and enough water during the growing season to produce large fruits. Apply enough water to wet the soil to a depth of 12”.

LIGHT Blueberries, like most berries, require good full sun.

PLANTING: The plants sold here at Weston Nurseries are container grown. Once you have determined the soil pH and planned any proper correction, you should plant according to our Planting Guidelines.

MULCHING: Blueberries do not like weed cover around the base, so it is important to use some type of mulch to hold down the weeds and retain moisture. Use a 4-6" layer, deeper than what is normally used for shrubs. Pine bark, pine needles, leaf mold, or even sawdust can be used.

POLLINATION: Hybrid blueberries generally are self-unfruitful. It is necessary to plant at least two varieties and a combination of any two is satisfactory although the pair should bloom at the same time. Production is increased by planting three varieties.

FRUIT PRODUCTION: Six plants will produce 15-20 quarts in a season. A blueberry planting should produce for about 25 years if properly maintained. Each variety usually yields for a 2 to 3 week period.

PRUNING: When first planting blueberries, it is best to remove about one half of the upper branches, thus allowing the root system to develop. If this is done, no pruning is required for three years. In the fourth and following years, pruning should be done annually during dormancy. Remove the lower weak branches, some of the older stems, and most branches under 6" in length. Pruning should be done in winter or during early spring before the buds begin to swell.

FERTILIZING: Do not fertilize when planting. At that time you can use bone meal, triple phosphate (0-46-0), or rock phosphate (0-3-0) in the planting hole. Blueberries should be fertilized annually thereafter with a fertilizer blended for azaleas and rhododendrons. This should be spread in two applications: the first at blossom time and the second a month later. Spread the fertilizer on the ground in a circle within the drip line of the plant.

HARVESTING: The harvest period for blueberries in our area will range from July 1 through late August depending on the varieties and the weather. An important consideration is the protection of the ripe fruit from birds starting about a week before the fruit ripens. You can build a permanent netting structure using a pipe frame over the entire planting, or you can cover them individually with netting that reaches to the ground on all sides. Pick the berries when they are fully ripe on the plant, solid blue and with a whitish glow. Blueberries will produce 2 to 3 weeks from the first ripe berry to the last one picked. To harvest for a longer period, you should plant early, midseason, and late varieties.

BLUEBERRY VARIETIES BY SEASON

Early season (late June/early July):

Duke Medium size, firm, light blue, very sweet fruit. Approximately 65 berries per cup. Heavy, consistent producer, 10-15 lbs. per bush. (HB)

Patriot Large, firm berry, tends to be flatter than other cultivars. Vigorous grower and highly productive, 10-20 lbs. per bush. (HH)

Mid season (mid July):

<i>Berkley</i>	Late midseason. One of the largest fruits, light blue, resistant to cracking, high quality and excellent flavor. Vigorous, spreading plants. Average yield 5 lbs. per bush. (HB)
<i>Bluecrop</i>	Early to midseason. Large, firm berry with excellent flavor, good for fresh eating, baking, and freezing. Average yield 12-20 lbs. per bush. One of the most widely planted in the U. S. (HB)
<i>Blueray</i>	Very large, firm, light blue highly flavored fruit. Approximately 60 berries per cup. High yield, 10-20 lbs. per bush. (HB)
<i>Chippewa</i>	Medium size, light blue, sweet. Yields 3.5-7 lbs. per bush. Compact shrub, 3' tall by 3' wide. Hardy to zone 4. (HH)
<i>Jersey</i>	Late midseason. Small to medium, sweet fruit known for good flavor, excellent for baking. Approximately 110 berries per cup, 7-10 lbs. per bush. (HB)
<i>Northcountry</i>	Sweet, medium size sky-blue fruit. Vigorous, compact plants 18-24" tall. (HH)
<i>Northland</i>	Small, dark, soft fruit. Heavy production on well branched, compact plants that require heavy pruning for best production. Very hardy. (HH)
<i>Northblue</i>	Large, light blue fruit with wild blueberry flavor. Excellent for baking and eating fresh. Up to 7 lbs. of fruit per plant at maturity. Compact, dense habit. (HH)
<i>Stanley</i>	Large, deep blue color, very sweet fruit on vigorous, well branched plants. Very productive. (HB)
<i>Northsky</i>	Very compact, dense habit when mature, usually 1-2' tall. Wonderful flavor and sweetness. Yields 4 lbs. per bush. Extremely cold hardy, suitable for container planting. (HH)

Late season (late July/August):

<i>Atlantic</i>	Large, light blue fruit, resistant to cracking during wet weather. Sprawling habit. Very heavy producer. (HB)
<i>Brunswick</i>	Firm, sky-blue, pea-sized, sweet flavor similar to wild blueberries. Forms a dense groundcover 1' to 2' high, if planted in groups. Hardy to zone 4. (LB)
<i>Coville</i>	One of the best late varieties. Large, good blue color, good quality, aromatic fruit, but tart until ripe. Resistant to cracking and premature fruit drop. (HB)
<i>Elliot</i>	Very late. Sweet, slightly tangy fruit. Small to medium berries, approximately 75 berries per cup. Good for jelly and freezing. Bush is 5' to 7' high at maturity, yields 10-20 lbs. per bush. (HB)
<i>Lateblue</i>	Very late season. Medium to large dark blue fruit, medium firm, tart. Fresh eating or baking. (HB)

<i>Rubel</i>	A true wild blueberry variety discovered in the early 1900s. Popular still for small (1/4" to 1/2"), blue-black berries, excellent for baking. (HB)
<i>Ruby Carpet</i>	Small fruit similar in flavor to wild blueberries. Low spreading habit, 4 to 6" high at maturity. Hardy to zone 4. (LB)
<i>Scammell</i>	Medium, dark blue fruit. A 1930s cultivar. Resistant to canker. (HB)

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93 East Main Street, P. O. Box 186
Hopkinton, MA 01748
Garden Center Phone: 508-435-3414
Garden Center Fax: 508-435-9022
www.WestonNurseries.com