

# Growing Blueberries

## NEW TRENDS IN BLUEBERRIES

A Native American plant, the Blueberry is almost the perfect fruit: beautiful, ornamental, easy to grow, and it has the highest concentration of antioxidants and lycopine of any fruit. Blueberries are good for you!

Traditionally, growers use **Northern Highbush** varieties which require a good winter chill for best production.

In the past 10 years there has been a storm of new introductions coming out of the southern states. These **Southern**

**Highbush** varieties will tolerate the low-chill winters of Alameda County. Both will do well in Contra Costa County.

Chilling is the number of hours below 45°F in the dormant season. Contra

Costa averages 700-1000 hrs., while Alameda averages 400-700.

## BLUEBERRIES IN CONTAINERS

To make growing Blueberries easier, DON'T Plant them in the ground!

- Blueberries make wonderful container plants.
- They are very ornamental as well as productive when grown in a container.

The trick is the soil mix. Blueberries like a low pH of 4.5 to 6.0 with 5.5 being optimal. But they also like to grow in actively decomposing organic matter.

*Here is a mix that has been very successful:*

1/3 part Micro Bark, 1/3 part Acid Mix (Azalea, Camellia, Gardenia Planting Mix), 1/3 part Gold Rush or Black Forest compost. Mix together and add 2 tablespoons of Soil Sulfur or FST per plant. This will get your container Blueberry off to a great start. Then in spring, use a fertilizer high in nitrogen and minor nutrients like a mixture of E.B. Stone Cottonseed Meal (6-2-1) and Dr. Earth Kelp Meal or Garden Elements Organic Acid Food (5-5-3).

Check carefully when selecting other fertilizers, the Nitrogen must not be from Nitrate, as this can be deadly to blueberries.

We recommend planting three varieties with different ripening seasons in one large container so you can have ripe Blueberries from May to August!

## PRUNING

Pruning is important in blueberry establishment and maintenance for several reasons:

- Minimize or restrict fruiting in years 1-3 to encourage vegetative development.
- Maintain balance between vegetative growth, root development, and flowering and fruit set.
- Develop overall plant shape, which encourages upright growth, large canes and open central canopy.
- Thin out excess flowering and fruiting to improve fruit size and quality.

After your blueberry planting comes into production in year three, it is still important to prune once or twice per year. This will open the canopy of the plant to allow light and ventilation to reach the inside of the plant. This will encourage fruiting in the inner part of the plant and reduce pressure from foliar diseases. It is also important to eliminate smaller, horizontal branches, which produce few fruit and are more difficult to pick.



## VARIETIES BY SEASON

Remember: All blueberries will yield a much bigger crop when paired with another variety. Choose your varieties by season to extend the harvest.

*The following varieties are coded as (N) for Northern Highbush and (S) for Southern Highbush.*

### EARLY SEASON (LATE MAY INTO JUNE)

**Earliblue (N)** – First to ripen. Large, light blue, delicious sweet flavored berries. An upright bush with stout canes, bright red wood and large glossy green leaves. 800 hrs.

**Misty (S)** – Many love Misty's early midseason fruits. The flavor is outstanding and the medium fruits are of good quality for fresh markets. The upright growth habit makes it ideal for hand harvesting. 300 hrs.

**O'Neal (S)** – A strong growing plant suitable for mechanical harvest because of its firm fruit, and limber branches. A good choice for fresh market, fruits are medium to large and flavorful. Very early. 400 hrs.

**Sharpblue (S)** – An early ripening fruit that has been popular and widely planted since its release in 1974. Medium size fruits are very high in flavor. 200 hrs.

### MID SEASON (JUNE)

**Bluecrop (N)** – Considered the best all around variety for consistent yields, large, high quality fruit, and disease resistance. An upright, open growing bush to 4-6 feet. There are other varieties with better ornamental value but none better in the garden. The leading commercial variety in North America. 800 hrs.

**Blueray (N)** – An old favorite. Heavy producer of high quality large, powder blue berries with outstanding flavor. Performs well in areas with hot summers or very cold winters. The stunning rosy pink flowers turn bright white in full bloom. An upright, open bush to 5 feet with burgundy leaves in fall. 800 hrs.



**Jubilee (S)** – An upright, compact plant that is well adapted to heavier soils. The “sky blue” fruits are medium in size and especially tasty, growing in large clusters that ripen over a two week period. 500 hrs.

**Southmoon (S)** – Ripens a few days later than Star and serves as an excellent companion/pollinator for most cultivars. The fruits are very firm and are excellent for fresh markets. Flavor of the fruits are desirable with high sweetness and acid blends. 500 hrs.

### LATE SEASON (LATE JUNE INTO JULY)

**Sunshine Blue (S)** – From blueberry expert Dr. Arthur Elliott, this cultivar is recommended as an ornamental because of its outstanding pink flowers, twiggy branchlets and low stature at maturity. Fruits are numerous; small to medium in size with excellent flavor. 150 hrs.

**Berkeley (N)** – One of the most popular home garden varieties. 5-6 feet high and wide when mature. An excellent producer in mild climates, Berkeley boasts a very attractive powder blue fruit with a pleasing mild flavor. Bright yellow wood in the winter makes a nice contrast to other red wooded varieties. 800 hrs.

**Bountiful Blue (S)** – This is the leading and most adaptable variety for low chill areas. Delicious, large, sky-blue berries are especially sweet and flavorful. Ripens mid to late season. Semi-dwarf upright plants to 3-4' tall have pretty bluish foliage, too. 150-200 hrs.