

Blueberries are deciduous (mostly) fruiting shrubs with ornamental fall foliage color. Many even offer colorful winter bark. They make handsome plants for a hedge or border and are easily incorporated into the landscape. Most varieties grow about 4-6 feet tall; some have a more erect habit and others are more spreading. Many dwarf varieties are also available. Plant 3 feet apart for an informal hedge, 4 to 5 feet apart otherwise. Several of the smaller varieties do well in containers on decks or patios, and the new Patio series has been bred to thrive in those conditions. However, remember that plants in containers are more exposed to extremes than the same plant in the ground: they will warm up faster, freeze sooner, and dry out more quickly. So adjust your watering and cultural practices to compensate for that.

Blueberries thrive in conditions that suit rhododendrons and azaleas. They need full sun and cool, moist soil that drains well. Blueberries are very shallow-rooted; be careful not to cultivate deeply around their bases. Weeds, lack of ample water, and birds will limit yields. Mulching with compost or bark will limit competition from weeds and conserve moisture. A light mulch at planting time, increased to a depth of 6 inches over a period of years, is ideal. On hot days blueberries will use about 2 gallons of water per plant. Too much fluctuation between dry and wet soil is the worst thing for blueberries.

Do not prune until the plants are 3 to 4 years old. This allows the plant to build strength and make maximum growth. Fruit buds for the following year are produced on new shoots. Removing old branches forces this new growth, thus assuring adequate and vigorous fruiting wood. Pruning in general will tend to reduce the number of berries but will increase their size and speed their maturation. Prune during the dormant season. On older bushes, remove a few older canes or cut them back to a strong lateral (side branch). Remove low spreading branches near the ground, as berries on them get dirty easily. Thin the shorter, weaker fruiting twigs on varieties that produce too many fruit buds.

Most varieties of blueberries are not self-fertile. That means a plant's flowers can't be pollinated by its own pollen (or by the pollen from a clone, i.e. another plant of the same blueberry variety), so you need to plant two different varieties to ensure fruit set. Any two varieties will cross-pollinate regardless of ripening time. A few varieties are self-fertile; that will always be noted in the variety descriptions. With self-fertile plants, you will get decent fruit production from a single plant, but fruit set will often be heavier with cross-pollination from another variety. With young plants especially, overproduction can be a problem. Thinning the blossoms or green berries may promote larger fruit and a healthier bush.

Fertilizing blueberries is governed by the length of the new shoot growth on mature canes. Plants that make little or no shoot growth should receive the maximum recommended amount. Plants that make 1 foot or more of new shoot growth need little or no fertilizer. Blueberries may require little or no fertilizer if the soil is rich. If growth is slow, use an organic rhododendron food around mid-March at the rate recommended for that size shrub. Exercise caution when fertilizing young plants (1 to 2 years old) because fertilizer can damage their roots.

Fruit will mature between July 1 and October 1, depending on the variety. Berries are produced in clusters and ripen in succession over a period of time before full maturity of flavor is reached. Try to delay picking until a fair quantity of berries acquires full size and flavor. They will become sweeter the longer they hang on the bush. Put netting over the bushes if birds become a problem. You can expect 5 or more pounds of fruit per mature large highbush plant. Varieties differ as to the size of the scar when you pick the berry (the small puckered area at the top of the berry

where you pluck it off the stem). The smaller the scar, the better the berry will keep under refrigeration or freezing. Scar size does not affect the berry flavor.

Mummyberry can sometimes be a problem; it kills blossoms and shrivels berries. Destroy all affected fruit and clean up leaves around plants each fall.

Recent research has sparked interest in the health benefits of blueberries. One serving (1/2 cup) of blueberries has only 43 calories—but it provides 8% of the RDI for fiber, 16% for Vitamin C, and more antioxidants than five servings of most other fruits or vegetables. Regular consumption of blueberries has been linked to improved eye sight, lower cholesterol, improved urinary tract health, and the reduction of various problems associated with aging, including improved memory and motor skills, reduced skin wrinkles, and the alleviation of arthritis pain. For current research, see <http://www.blueberrycouncil.org/health-benefits-of-blueberries/blueberry-nutrition/>

### **NORTHERN Highbush Varieties**

**Bluecrop:** Midseason. Medium to large, loose clusters of large, firm, crack-resistant, light blue fruit. Small scar. High quality fruit with good sub acid flavor. Good for fresh eating, preserves, baking and freezing. Vigorous, upright growth will reach 4 to 6 feet at maturity. Tends to overbear. Good disease resistance. Light red bark in winter.

**Bluegold:** Mid to late season. Medium to large, light blue fruit with good sweet flavor. Small scar. Compact rounded bush grows 3 to 5 feet tall and wide. Bright yellow fall foliage.

**Bluejay:** Early midseason. Medium size light blue fruit. Fruit stays on the bush a long time without loss of quality. Flavor is mild and slightly tart; berry is firm and juicy, excellent for muffins and pies. Vigorous and very productive, grows 5 to 6 feet tall at maturity. Orange to red fall color.

**Blueray:** Early midseason. An old favorite. Small, tight clusters of large to very large light blue fruit. Soft, firm skin resists cracking. Small to medium scar. Excellent flavor—sweet, slightly tart, and aromatic. Vigorous and very productive, grows 4 to 6 feet tall at maturity. Burgundy fall color--bright red bark in winter. Rosy pink flowers.

**Chandler:** Mid to late season. Extremely large fruit—cherry size! Sweet delicious flavor. Extended ripening season of up to six weeks, providing a good supply of berries for fresh eating. Vigorous grower, slightly spreading habit to 5 to 6 feet tall. Cold hardy.

**Chippewa:** Midseason. Large, sweet, light blue fruit. Very good quality fruit with excellent flavor. 3 to 4 feet tall and wide; fiery red fall foliage. Very cold hardy.

**Darrow:** Late season. Very heavy production of very large (up to the size of a quarter), tart, flavorful, light blue berries. Plants are 6-8' tall, very vigorous, upright. Vibrant scarlet fall color.

**Draper:** Early midseason. Large, powder blue, flavorful fruit; very firm and juicy. Berry harvest is concentrated; berries last well once picked. Compact plant. Bred at Michigan State University; tolerates cold winters.

**Duke:** Early season. Medium to large size light blue berries. Mildly tart flavor. Small scar. Very firm, retains freshness longer than other varieties. Blooms late but ripens early. Heavy, consistent producer. Yellow orange foliage in fall.

**Earliblue:** Very early season. The first to ripen! Medium-large, firm, light blue fruit in long, loose clusters. Resists cracking. Medium scar. Good dessert quality—sweet, aromatic flavor. Good cling. Vigorous, erect growth habit to 5 to 6 feet tall. Bright red bark in winter.

**Elliott:** Very late season. Bears well into September! Heavy producer of sky blue fruit. Tart flavor if not picked when fully ripe. Burgundy bark in winter.

**Jersey:** Late season. Easy to grow, heavy producing variety. Old favorite of home gardeners for its reliable production of dark blue, small to medium very sweet and spicy fruit. Excellent variety for pies and preserves! Very large bush can reach 7' at maturity. Yellow fall color; yellow winter wood.

**Liberty:** Late season. Very heavy production of large berries with nice balanced sweet-tart flavor makes this a new favorite. 6-8' tall, very vigorous. Bright red to orange fall color.

**Nocturne:** Late to very late season. Unripe fruit is a vivid, ornamental orange-red, ripening to a glossy dark blue, almost black. Medium size, sweet, with a unique flavor. 5-6' tall, vigorous and very cold-hardy.

**Northblue:** Midseason. Plump, sweet, firm dark-blue fruit. Very good quality fruit with a superior wild blueberry flavor. Produces 3 to 7 pounds of fruit at maturity. 2 to 3 feet tall, spreading habit.

**Northcountry:** Midseason. Medium size with an appealing sweet, wild blueberry flavor. Yields will range between 2 to 5 pounds per mature bush. Vigorous and adapts to less than ideal soils. Grows 1 ½ to 2 feet tall and spreads to 3 ½ feet. Scarlet fall color.

**Northland:** Early midseason. Most cold hardy highbush variety. 4 feet tall and wide at maturity. Dark blue medium sized fruit, excellent for jams and baking because of their high sugar content. Very productive- mature plant can produce over 20 pounds of berries per bush.

**Patriot:** Early season. Dark blue, large, highly flavored berries. Let ripen fully for best sweetness. Small scar. Low growing, spreading to 4 feet. Very cold hardy. Fiery orange fall color.

**Pink Lemonade:** Mid to late season. Firm, sweet fruit is bright pink when ripe—very unusual, but with true blueberry flavor. 5-6' foot plant is highly ornamental, with a vigorous upright form, glossy foliage, pinkish-white flowers in spring and the distinctive pink berries in the summer. Fall foliage is golden to orange; winter twigs are reddish. Self-fertile.

**Razz:** Mid season. Medium to large, plump, powder blue berries are sweet-tart with *raspberry overtones* to the flavor! Good producer. 4-6' tall, Bright red to orange fall color.

**Reka:** Early season. Medium to large size dark blue berries. Tart and flavorful. Reka was bred in New Zealand; it is tolerant of a wide range of soil types. Very vigorous plant. Burgundy fall color.

**Spartan:** Early. One of the most attractive and best-flavored berries. Light blue, very large (often covering a quarter) fruit has a tangy, sweet, delicious flavor. Plant requires well-draining soil with lots of organic matter. Upright bush to 5-6 feet. Orange-yellow fall color.

**Top Hat:** Midseason. The pea size, firm, light blue fruit has wild blueberry flavor. Dwarf nicely-shaped plant growing 1½ feet tall and wide. Excellent for containers and bonsai.

**Toro:** Midseason. Very large, sky-blue fruit in full heavy clusters. Vigorous stocky bush grows 4-6 feet. Outstanding sprightly flavor. Excellent ornamental with bronzy new foliage, pink-tinged flowers, and bright red fall color. Light red twigs in winter.

### **SOUTHERN Highbush Varieties**

The southern highbush varieties have been bred for good fruit production with lower winter chilling requirements. All southern highbush varieties carried by Sky are self-fertile; most are evergreen or semi-evergreen.

**Bountiful Blue:** Midseason. Big clusters of large sweet fruit. Semi dwarf grows to 3 feet high and 4 wide. Semi-evergreen foliage is gorgeous blue-green.

**Misty:** Early. Abundant crops of medium to large sky-blue berries with mild, sweet flavor. Fast growing to 5-6' high and wide. Semi-evergreen; fall chill will make foliage turn brilliant red before dropping.

**Sunshine Blue:** Midseason. Dime size sweet and slightly tangy fruit—produced for up to 9 weeks. Semi dwarf, compact grower to 3 feet. Hot pink flowers fade to white. Semi-evergreen. Ornamental and productive.

### **Patio Varieties (Brazelberries)**

The new Patio introductions have been bred to be ornamental and productive in containers or small spaces. Like the southern highbush blueberries, the Patio varieties are self-fertile—you will get berry production with a single bush.

**Blueberry Glaze:** Midseason. Compact (two to three feet) plant is very ornamental, with dark glossy boxwood-like foliage and white and pink flowers in spring. Fruit is small, very dark (almost black), with intense flavor comparable to wild blueberries. Fruit is also very high in antioxidants.

**Jelly Bean:** Midseason. Dwarf, compact (one to two feet by two feet) plant is very productive, with large, extremely sweet berries. New foliage is brilliant green, turning to darker green with red hues that contrast nicely with the blue fruit.

**Peach Sorbet:** Midseason. Named for its peach-colored foliage, not its berry color. Berries are sweet, midsized, and a medium blue. The new growth emerges a lovely blend of peachy-pink to orange to cream to emerald, turning a glossy green as the foliage matures. The flowers are pinkish-white. This compact (two feet by two feet) and attractive plant will be evergreen most winters, and our winter chill will flush its foliage a rich eggplant purple.

**Perpetua:** Midseason and fall—two seasons of harvest! Plants are semi-evergreen; dark curly foliage turns red or light green in the winter. Winter branches are red and yellow. It's renowned for giving you two full crops of small, sweet, powder-blue fruit.

**Pink Icing:** Midseason. Another one named for its spectacular foliage. New foliage is rosy pink to purple mixed with deep green and shades of blue. Pink accents will continue to grace the bush in the summer, contrasting nicely with the pale pink flowers and fat clusters of luscious light blue berries. Then in the winter, the foliage becomes iridescent turquoise with purple accents.