



Just
The
Facts

BLUEBERRY

JUST FRUITS & EXOTICS

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INTRODUCTION

Native throughout most of the eastern United States, blueberries are one of the easiest and most rewarding fruits the homeowner can grow. The bushes require a little effort to establish, but once rooted are very disease and drought resistant; most fruit their second year. Thanks to recent breeding programs at the Universities of Florida and Georgia, we now have a wide range of varieties to choose from, making it possible to have delicious blueberries from early May to late July! We attend many blueberry seminars throughout the year so we are always up on the latest and most practical techniques to help you with site evaluation, soil preparation, correct planting procedures and maintenance of your blueberry patch.

USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Anywhere you want a hedge, think of blueberries first. These durable, low-maintenance shrubs have a unique misty blue cast and are truly beautiful in all seasons. In spring, dainty, bell-like white blooms cover reddish canes. Flowers are followed by blue-tinged foliage and huge clusters of powder blue fruit. In autumn they make a brilliant show as they turn from orange to scarlet to fiery red.

If you want a short thick hedge, tetraploids grow more slowly and can be sheared. Rabbit-eye varieties make a nice thick hedge anywhere from 6-20 feet high. Use blueberries to line a driveway or walkway or as backdrop hedges. In the garden, line a fence with blueberries for luscious fruit that doesn't take much space and is always lovely. Choose varieties with different ripening times to spread the fruiting season. Blueberries can also be trained into fountain-shaped shrubs or small trees. Some varieties do well as container plants for a patio gardener.

CONSIDERATIONS IN CHOOSING BLUEBERRY VARIETIES

Blueberries require cross pollination. Thus we always have to plant at least two varieties to ensure good fruit set. Two groups of blueberries are available. **Rabbit-eye** blueberries were developed from native rabbit-eye blueberries. They grow as shrubs and will reach 6-20 feet. Their ripening season is

from May to July. **Tetraploid** blueberries are a new development - a cross between Rabbiteye and Northern Highbush blueberries. Everything is different about them. They are smaller, slower-growing and have thicker, more crinkly leaves. Most important, they extend the blueberry season by ripening heavy crops at the very start of the blueberry season. Tetraploids require some extra fruit thinning to achieve a balance between plant size and healthy fruit production. Each group requires a pollinator from within the group—you must plant at least two varieties of rabbiteye or two varieties of tetraploid. A brief list of varieties is at the end of this handout. All are more fully described in the Just Fruits and Exotics Catalog.

PLANTING AND CULTURE

SITE SELECTION

Well-drained sandy loam soils are preferred, but blueberries will grow on many soil types if good drainage is provided. Blueberries will grow more vigorously and produce more fruit in full sun. Avoid frost pockets - late season frosts can damage fruit production in early-flowering varieties.

SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING

Blueberries require acid soil (pH 4.5-5.5). If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a soil sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test. Adjust soil acidity as necessary with powdered sulfur and iron sulfate. Do NOT use aluminum sulfate, as this material is toxic to blueberries. For individual plants, sulfur a 6 x 6 foot area around the plant. Hedgerows need to be sulfured in a 3foot wide band down the row.

In the area you plan to put blueberries, it is advisable to till in some form of acidic organic matter like ground pine bark or oak leaves. Dig a planting hole approximately twice as big as the pot and twice as deep. Enrich the planting hole with peat moss or pine bark mixed with soil dug from the hole (50:50 mix). Do NOT add mushroom compost to the planting hole or use it as mulch.

Remove the blueberry bush from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. The bush should be planted **at or slightly above** the same level at which it grew in its pot. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT fertilize at the time of planting.

If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the bush approximately 36 inches in diameter. Blueberries are very shallowly rooted, like azaleas. Mulch in spring and fall with approximately 4-6 inches of acid mulch (pine bark, oak leaves). Do NOT mulch with mushroom compost.

Spacing for blueberries depends upon the desired use in the landscape. Bushes can be planted individually or in a hedgerow. If planting a hedgerow, space 4-6 feet apart with rows 10-12 feet apart. If planting bushes individually, place plants for cross pollination no more than 10 feet apart. Remove all flowers the first year to encourage more growth.

FERTILIZATION

We recommend a slow release 12-4-8 fertilizer with micro-nutrients, like those designed for azaleas and camellias. Check for a mix that contains iron, zinc, manganese, molybdenum, copper and boron. Read and follow directions. We use approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ pound of fertilizer per application for each year of a blueberry's age (i.e. $\frac{1}{4}$ pound per application for a one year-old blueberry). Be careful to spread the fertilizer evenly over the blueberry's root zone and water it in well. Fertilize 3 times each year in February, May and August, avoiding a 2 inch area around the trunk.

WATER

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new blueberry bush. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply. Established bushes should receive at least 1 inch of water each week. Because blueberries are very shallowly rooted, we strongly recommend that irrigation be installed when you plant your blueberries. Microsprinkler irrigation works best, because water is spread over the root zone. Soaker hoses can be used in a pinch. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Keep an area approximately 4 feet in diameter around the bush clear of grass and weeds to minimize competition for water and nutrients. Mulch this area in spring and fall with 4-6 inches of an acid mulch like pine bark or oak leaves.

PRUNING

Routine pruning of blueberries is unnecessary until plants are 3 years old. During this time, remove dead, damaged or diseased limbs. Make all cuts flush with the limb or the next largest branch. Do not leave stubs.

For established rabbiteye blueberries, approximately one quarter of the oldest canes are pruned each year to encourage cane renewal. Three to four year-old canes have maximum fruit production, declining with age. Blueberries can be lightly topped right after fruit harvest to hold down the height of the plant. All heavy thinning cuts should be made in the dormant season.

INSECT AND DISEASE CONTROL

Blueberries have few disease or insect problems. Occasionally caterpillars can be a problem and may be controlled with products containing Bt (*Bacillus thuringensis*).

Variety List

Early Season

Climax
Becky
Misty (tetraploid)
Blue Crisp (tetraploid)
O'Neil (tetraploid)
Star (tetraploid)
Windsor (teraploid)
Millenia (teraploid)

Mid Season

Bluebelle
Premier
Dixie
Austin
Delight
Choice
Bluegem
Brightwell

Late Season

Tiftblue
Baldwin
Powderblue
Centurion

Rabbiteye Blueberry Varieties....

Early Ripening

CLIMAX Climax is one of the best varieties for commercial planting and for people who do a lot of freezing, because it has a very concentrated ripening period. This allows you harvest and preserve or sell your berries all at one time. Climax is large, firm-fleshed with a spicy sweet flavor.

Mid Season Varieties

BLUEGEM Another variety that ripens its berries all at one time. This variety has very heavy production and a unique, heavy wax that covers the fruit and new growth. This gives the bush and berries a light powdery blue cast that is distinctly beautiful. Fruit doesn't drop and stores well on the bush. Firm fruit with a distinct blueberry jam flavor.

BLUEBELLE Highly recommended for all blueberry lovers! Beautiful, big, supreme-flavored berries that will ripen a few daily for over a month! A blueberry grazers dream!

AUSTIN New Florida release. Large fruit and excellent yeild. Ripens early June.

DIXIE Made for the South. Reliable fruitier with with an excellent fresh flavor. Ripens early June.

BRITEWELL New Georgia release. Plants are super vigorous and upright. A heavy producer of light blue, firm berries with sweet sugary flavor.

CHOISE Vigorous and high yielding variety. Large, medium light blue, crisp and aromatic, fine flavor.

DELIGHT Large tasty berries. This variety has the unique feature of sweetening up before it completely ripens. This reduces your chances of getting a sour berry in your basket! Let them ripen to a dark blue and they will be super sweet.

Late Ripening Varieties

BALDWIN The last blueberry to ripen. Fruit is huge and very sweet. Heavy producer. Ripens late July.

TIFTBLUE Hundreds of acres are planted with Tiftblue and many new varieties have some Tiftblue in them, as it's one of the most popular standards to breed from. The plants are tall, vigorous and upright. Berries are large, very firm, and highly flavored, and hold well on the bush.

CENTURION Centurion ends the blueberry season with a bang! Darker than most blueberries, with a crisp, aromatic and spicy flavor. The plants stand out with shiny, leather-like foliage

Tetraploids....

A new breed of early ripening Blueberry, tetraploids are a cross between rabbiteye and northern highbush Blueberries. Every thing is different about the tetraploids; the plants are smaller, the leaves are different, thicker and more crinkly, and they ripen early and bear more heavily than rabbiteyes.

O'NEIL One of the best tasting berries for fresh eating. An excellent pollinator for Bluecrisp. Ripens in early June.

BLUECRISP Newly released tetraploid variety. Crispy sweet, delicious berries. Use O'Neil for pollinator. Ripens mid May.

MISTY New University of Florida release. This southern Highbush ripens in early May. Berries have a misty blue color when ripe. Flavor is tops! One of the best varieties for ornamental use.