

Blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.)

Useful Plants Nursery carries a wide selection of blueberries to meet different climate and landscape needs, as well as to provide a long season of tasty berries!



Exposure: Full sun to part shade,

Northern blueberries – Zones 6b (Asheville, NC) and cooler

Southern blueberries – Zones 6b and warmer

Rabbiteye blueberries – Zones 6b and warmer

Soil: Acidic, moist, well-drained soil with high organic content. Always mulch plants well and maintain even moisture for best growth and production. Rabbiteyes are more tolerant of clay soils than the northern or southern varieties. Add organic matter to the soil if necessary to break up heavy soils.

Growth habits: Southern lowbush and highbush blueberries, and rabbiteye blueberries are native to the Southeastern US. Rabbiteyes are more drought and heat tolerant than lowbush and highbush blueberries. Blueberry bushes usually begin bearing in the nursery. UPN recommends that the berries be picked off the plant as they appear first year after planting so the plant can focus on growing roots.

Northern blueberries: highbush: 4-7' tall, half-height and lowbush: 2-4' tall

Southern blueberries: highbush: 4-6' tall, lowbush: 2-4' tall

Rabbiteye blueberries: 6-14' tall

Landscape uses: Blueberries are deciduous, with foliage that turns from greenish-grey to yellow or red in autumn. Blueberries do well in berry orchards, edible hedges, foundation plantings, and even as landscape specimens with their multiple seasons of interest and good winter form.

Edible/Medicinal properties: A mature bush can produce a considerable amount of berries for its size. A mature rabbiteye can produce 8 to 22 pounds of fruit each year. Blueberries have high levels of antioxidants.

Pollination: Plant two or more varieties for season extension. Most rabbiteyes require two varieties for pollination.

Caring for your blueberry plants

Pruning: Prune new blueberry plants in the late winter or early spring -- after the late freezes and before they leaf out. Remove any dead or damaged wood, crossing branches, and little twiggy wood. As blueberry plants mature remove the oldest and weakest branches to keep the best 3-4 branches from the previous 3-4 years, for about a dozen main branches for each plant. This can maintain your plant in the most productive state decades.

Rehabilitate older blueberry bushes by retiring the older branches to open up the center of the plant. See the pruning videos on the UPN website for a demonstration of pruning techniques for new and elder blueberry plants.

Watering: A blueberry bush will likely need to be watered once or twice a week during its first year. The water requirements decrease as the root system becomes established. The ground needs to remain moist. Maintaining a 2" mulch will reduce watering requirements.

Fertilization: Fertilize blueberry plants starting every six weeks from March through June with a fertilizer intended for acid-loving plants, such as Holly-tone, Hollycare, or cottonseed meal. If your soil has a high pH, you might need to add extra sulphur when you fertilize.

No calcium! – Calcium is the kiss of death for blueberries! Avoid calcium in rock mulch (use granite rather than limestone) and avoid egg shells in compost. Check the calcium level in any amendments before using them with blueberries. Be especially careful with phosphate -- some phosphates have a high calcium content.

Frequently asked questions about blueberries

The leaves on my blueberry bush are turning yellow. What's wrong?

The most likely cause of problems with blueberry bushes is the presence of calcium. If your soil has a high pH, the plant might need some sulphur to make the soil more acidic.

My blueberry has droopy leaves. Why is that?

Droopy leaves are a sign of stress. The most common causes of stress are overwatering or underwatering. Stress can also be caused by pests that damage the roots or stems.

Blueberries are especially sensitive to soil fungi, such as phythothena. When transplanting blueberries, dipping the plant in an organic fungicide, such as Actinolron, will help the roots avoid contracting fungus.

Can I plant a ground cover with my blueberries?

Blueberries have shallow roots and are very fussy about what plants they tolerate in their root zone. American cranberry is one of the few plants the blueberries will tolerate. Cranberry plants are short, with small leaves and red berries.

Additional information

See the Useful Plants Nursery website at www.usefulplants.org for videos demonstrating planting and other plant care techniques.