



15022 Twin Lakes Avenue, Marysville, WA 98271 • [www.theplantfarm.com](http://www.theplantfarm.com) • 360-652-3351

## Blueberry Planting and Care

**B**lueberries combine the best of both plant worlds for the home gardener: They provide delicious, nutritious fruit and they compete head-to-head with many ornamental shrubs in their ability to add multi-season beauty to the landscape (most varieties boast great orange-to-red fall color). They are easy to grow and they love the mild summers and acidic soils found in Western Washington!

**Cultural Requirements:** Blueberries like acidic, well-drained soil in full sun. You can grow them in partial sun if you don't mind a lower yield. If your soil is heavily compacted, or low in organic matter, add compost, rotted manure or sawdust to the soil before planting, working it in to a depth of 18". This improves the soil's texture and improves its water-holding capacity.

**Planting Instructions:** Most blueberries grow to at least 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide, so plant them at least 6 feet apart. Or, plant them as close as 2½ feet apart and grow your own edible hedge. The top of the root clumps should be close to the soil surface if you will be using mulch, or about four inches below the surface without mulch.

**Water and Weeds:** Because blueberries have shallow, compact root systems, you must water regularly so the plant does not dry out, and you must take care when weeding or otherwise cultivating the soil within the plant's drip line. Applying a 4-6" deep mulch of fir sawdust, bark dust or compost conserves moisture and helps control weeds, eliminating much of the need for cultivation. Add 1" per year to maintain the appropriate depth.

**Fertility:** Fertilizing blueberries during the first 3-4 years encourages the development of healthy, well-spaced canes. However, do not fertilize young, newly transplanted blueberries for a year to avoid burning their root systems. After that, apply 2 oz (1/4 cup) of a fertilizer for acid-loving plants (we can give you some recommendations) in early spring (between March 15-April 15) on the surface of the mulch in a broad ring within the drip line of the plant (keep it away from the crown of the plant). Increase the amount of fertilizer by 2 oz. (1/4 cup) each year, holding steady at 6 years and beyond. For an organic fertilizing option, we offer cottonseed meal or rhododendron and azalea food.

**Fruit Production:** The early varieties begin ripening in June, and the late varieties in early August. To promote overall growth on your newly transplanted blueberry plant, it's a good idea to remove the blossoms the first spring, preventing fruiting. Because blueberries tend to over-bear rather than under-bear, thinning the blossoms in subsequent years will promote larger fruit and a healthier plant. Blueberries become sweeter as they hang on the bush, so the only possible reason to pick the fruit early (as they turn blue) is to save them from birds. If you'd rather not harvest early, try draping the bushes with bird netting (a large blueberry bush may have 15 to 20 pounds of fruit, so is worth protecting!). All blueberries are self-pollinating, but most perform better if you plant two or more varieties.

**Pruning:** Prune when the plants are dormant. Pruning in the fall (instead of in winter or early spring) may delay spring bloom and thus reduce the risk of spring frost damage. After the plant is established, you should remove any diseased or damaged branches, then prune out low, spreading branches near the ground. Remove old tired wood that is loaded with too many fruit buds and too few leaf buds.

## Blueberry Varieties for 2008

**Blueray:** *Midseason.* An old favorite. This variety is a heavy producer of high quality large, powder blue berries that have an outstanding dessert flavor. Performs well in areas with hot summers and very cold winters. Stunning rosy pink flowers fade to a bright white in full bloom. This upright and open growing bush can reach 5 feet.

**Brigitta:** *Late.* Fresh from Australia. This variety yields one of the highest quality berries available. The large, light blue berries are perfectly balanced between sweet, yet slightly tart flavor with a firm, crisp texture. Brigitta blueberries store well, maintaining their texture and flavor for over a month in the refrigerator. The slightly spreading bush is a fast grower with deep green foliage and bronze tinted new growth.

**Chandler:** *Mid to late season.* Delicious cherry-sized berries ripen over a period of six weeks. Not only is the fruit enormous, but it has delicious flavor to boot. The vigorous shrub has a slightly spreading habit, growing to 5-6' tall, spreading slightly wider. Large glossy green leaves turn orange and yellow in the fall. Particular about soil types, Chandler requires well drained sandy loam with lots of organic matter.

**Chippewa:** *Midseason.* Compact and slightly larger than Northblue. Very light blue fruit with an excellent sweet flavor yielding an average of 4-7 pounds of berries at maturity.

**Darrow:** *Late.* This variety produces one of the largest blueberries of all, with some actually reaching half-dollar size! The slightly flat, light blue fruit has a delightful robust flavor to go with its robust size. Little surprise that the bush is vigorous as well, reaching 5-6' tall, and 2/3 as wide.

**Duke:** *Early.* Reliable and productive, this variety produces plentiful crops of firm, sweet, powder-blue fruit. When mature, one bush can produce up to 20 pounds of berries. Grows 5-6 feet tall

**Earliblue:** *Very early.* Large, light blue fruit with excellent flavor is among the first to ripen. This tall, erect shrub grows 5-6' tall with bright red stems and large, glossy green leaves.

**Elliott:** *Very Late.* Enjoy fresh berries clear through September. This variety yields sky blue berries which can be quite tart unless picked fully ripe. Bright burgundy colored stems accent the gray-green foliage. The late bloom period and heavy bud set warrants extra pruning but will assure gardeners bountiful crops of larger fruit.

**Hardyblue:** *Midseason.* Known for its superior flavored, exceptionally sweet berries. Adaptable to many soil types including clay soils. This upright vigorous bush yields heavy crops of medium sized, dark blue fruit that are great for baking.

**Legacy:** *Late:* Vigorous, evergreen shrub reaching 6 feet and slightly spreading. This variety is referred to as the 'Gold Bush' due to its heavy production. The berries are medium-large, light blue with an excellent robust flavor.

**Northblue:** *Midseason.* Produces 3-7 pounds of large, excellent quality berries per mature bush that are great for baking and fresh eating. Plant height only reaches about 2-3 feet high. Very cold hardy.

**Northcountry:** *Early to mid season.* This variety has a compact growth habit reaching to about 2 feet high and 3 feet wide with dark green foliage. Produces medium sized fruit with an appealing sweet, "wild" blueberry flavor.

**Northland:** *Early to mid season.* The most cold-hardy highbush variety grown. Matures to 4 feet high and 4 feet wide. Produces large quantities of medium sized, dark blue berries perfect for jams and baking. Easy to grow and adaptable to many soil types.

. **Northsky:** *Midseason*. This cold hardy bush grows to a low compact mound about 12-18 inches tall and 2-3 feet wide. Takes off in spring covered in snow-white blooms which turn to small, sky blue, wild flavored berries. Particularly well suited for container growing, borders, or group plantings in the landscape. Self-pollinating.

**Patriot:** *Early*. This low growing, spreading bush reaches about 4 feet tall and produces between 10 and 20 pounds of large, dark blue, highly flavored berries at maturity. Performs well in many soil types including wetter soils.

**Polaris:** *Early*. Cold hardy and early ripening, this is a very aromatic and very sweet blueberries. For best pollination and fruit set plant with other cold hardy blueberries like Chippewa or Northblue.

**Sunshine Blue:** *Midseason*. A Southern Highbush variety offering dime-sized, tasty berries that have a unique, tangy flavor. This compact shrub has showy, hot pink flowers that fade to white in spring, and attractive, evergreen foliage. The 9-week harvest period lets the pleasure of fresh-from-the-garden berries go on and on. Self-pollinating. Grows to 3' tall and wide.

**Top Hat:** *Midseason*. A perfect name for this dwarf cultivar, growing to about 1 ½ feet high and wide. Plentiful white blooms in spring give way to pea sized light blue berries. This blueberry is perfect for defined border plantings or growing in pots.

**Toro:** *Midseason*. Outstanding ornamental bush, producing full, heavy clusters of giant, sky blue berries. The flowers turn from hot pink to bright white in a nice contrast with the bronze colored spring foliage. Deep green summer foliage turns to blazing red in the fall.