

REEMS CREEK NURSERY

Blueberries

Vaccinium

A Garden Guide

Blueberries (*Vaccinium* sect. *Cyanococcus*) are edible shrubs in the Rhododendron (*Ericaceae*) family. They are native to North America; the United States is the world leader in blueberry production. They can easily be incorporated into the home landscape as part of an ornamental planting. In addition to the lovely little bell-shaped flowers and tasty blue fruit, they have gorgeous red fall color, and their exfoliating bark provides winter-interest as well. They make wonderful edible hedges.



Northern highbush blueberry selections are best suited for Western North Carolina. A few exceptional Rabbiteye blueberries perform well here. Half-high varieties are a cross between Northern highbush and lowbush selections from the wild and if space is limited, may be grown in containers. There are also new mini hybrids available.

Light: Full sun (6-8 hours of direct sunlight) in order to create many blooms and berries. While the plants can tolerate less light, berry production will decrease.

Water: Ample moisture – always water well when planting, once a week until established (1-3 years), and provide extra water during periods of drought. Do not let stand in water. If you are planning on having many blueberries, consider installing irrigation.

Soil: Well-drained **VERY acidic soil** (4.5 – 5.5 ph). Good drainage is a must. Planting on slopes and adding generous amounts of soil conditioner can improve drainage in heavy clay soils.

Pollination: **Plant at least two different named selections for cross pollination and better fruit production.** Most bloom at the same time but depending upon the variety, usually ripen from mid-June to late-July. The flowers are pollinated by bees (mostly native Bumblebees and Carpenter bees, but other bees will pitch in to help) and because of the flower's shape they usually escape frost damage. Insects and diseases



are generally not a serious problem; however, birds love the fruit and covering the plants with netting can help.

Planting: Before planting, test the soil, and add in relevant amendments for addressing any soil pH issues. If possible, test the soil again right before planting. Ideally, sulfur will be mixed into the soil 3-4 months before planting time. Generous amounts of soil conditioner mixed into clay soil will help improve drainage. If dealing with heavy clay, you can mix $\frac{1}{2}$ soil conditioner to $\frac{1}{2}$ clay, and work in granular fertilizer such as Espoma

Holly-tone® or Espoma Bio-tone®. Worm castings are another great soil amendment. The hole itself will need to be wide and shallow, to accommodate the shallow root system. Plant no deeper than the root ball, spread roots and slightly cover. Mulch with pine bark, pine straw, or leaves at a depth of 2-4" to help protect the shallow root system and keep in moisture. To prevent rodent damage, keep mulch away from trunks. Space plants based on the information provided on the labels.

Maintenance: Trim off flower buds and about 1/3 of growth when planting. Fertilize twice a year - with Espoma Holly-tone® or Happy Frog® for Acid-Loving Plants - with the first application being when the buds begin to open and the second a month later. We have only mentioned organic fertilizers in this document, if you choose to use chemical fertilizers, know that blueberries are sensitive and can easily be burned by them. As the plants mature, annual pruning in late winter or early spring will help keep them in good condition.

Harvesting and Processing: Blueberries are delicious fresh in: the garden, smoothies, yogurt, as well as cooked into: jams, jellies, pancakes, muffins, pies, and more. They freeze well with a minimum of preparation. Blueberries are very high in healthful antioxidants.

Our staff experts hand select all the types of blueberries that we carry.

Version 2.2 Feb 21

