

Growing Blueberries

Learn how to grow low-bush, highbush and rabbiteye blueberries, and find out where they grow best.

By Barbara Pleasant June/July 2009

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/Real-Food/Growing-Blueberries.aspx>

With the lowest soil pH requirement of all berries, blueberries grow in the same acidic conditions that please other native shrubs such as rhododendron and azaleas. When the pH goes too high, blueberries turn yellow because they're unable to take up iron. Two or three foliar sprays with a kelp solution or iron-rich nettle tea, made a few days apart, will often bring plants back around, giving you time to heap on a fresh helping of an acidic mulch such as pine needles or pine bark. When growing blueberries in neutral soil, Uridel suggests amending the planting holes with plenty of acidic soil amendments like shredded pine bark, peat moss or leaf mold.

Northern gardeners will love thigh-high low-bush blueberries, which carry the flavor of their wild woodland ancestors. Lovely little plants to amass along a woodland edge, varieties such as 'Polaris' bloom so late that they're rarely sabotaged by late freezes.

The type grown in most areas of the country, northern highbush blueberries are a cinch to slip into puddles of sun in an edible landscape, and once established the bushes bear for decades. Heavy-bearing varieties can produce more than 10 pounds of fruit per bush at maturity, but 8 pounds per plant is more realistic. The same is true of rabbiteye blueberries, which are much-improved versions of a native species of the Southeast, where they are hugely popular — and productive. The strongest producer, 'Tifblue,' has been known to produce more than 13 pounds per bush, but 6 to 7 pounds is typical of most rabbiteyes.

More Information on Blueberries

Preferred soil pH for northern blueberries is 4.5 to 5.5. Preferred soil pH for rabbiteye blueberries is 5.5 to 6.0.

Blueberry Types

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/Real-Food/Blueberry-Types.aspx>

| Blueberry Type | Pros and Cons | Varieties | Regional Adaptation |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| Low-bush | Not as productive as other types, but useful for mass plantings in cold climates with acidic soil. | Minnesota-bred 'Polaris' and 'Northblue' grow less than 3 feet high and produce delicious berries. | Hardy to at least minus 25 degrees, these are great little shrubs for woodland edges in northern sites with acidic soil. |
| Highbush | These long-lived 5- to 6-foot bushes bear heavy crops with little maintenance and few pest problems. | Organically enriched acidic soil brings out the best flavor in 'Blue Moon,' 'Jersey' and other high-yielding varieties. | Require winter chilling, and hardy to at least minus 20 degrees; hardiness varies with variety. |
| Rabbiteye | Heavy-bearing bushes need little maintenance when kept mulched and grown in good soil. Plants can grow to 8 feet tall. | 'Tifblue,' 'Woodard' and 'Brightwell' are top blueberry varieties for flavor, vigor and productivity. | Best blueberries for the South. Need fertile acidic soil. Hardy to zero degrees or more; cold tolerance varies with variety. |