



Windcrest Farm Blueberries

Blueberries are members of the Rhododendron family and make an ideal year-round addition to the home garden. They have delicate white or pink flowers in the spring, the summer fruit has an attractive blue color, and the fall foliage adds hues of red to the landscape. In addition, blueberry plants are easy to grow organically because pesticides are rarely needed in home garden plantings. Blueberries are the most widely grown fruit crop in North Carolina.

Based on data from the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging (Boston, MA) using a test called ORAC (Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity), researchers have shown that a serving of fresh blueberries provided more antioxidant activity than many other fresh fruits and vegetables. Blueberries are rich in Vitamins A, C, E and beta-carotene as well as rich in the minerals potassium, manganese, magnesium. They are very high in fiber and low in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.

Helpful Link: Nutrition Data, Know What You Eat:

<http://www.nutritiondata.com/facts/fruits-and-fruit-juices/1851/2>

There are three main types of cultivated blueberry bushes

- The Highbush, which grows as far west as Wisconsin and as far south as the northern areas of Georgia.
- The Rabbiteye, native to southern Georgia and Alabama and found as far south as Florida.
- Low-bush berries, which are actually creeping shrubs that rarely grow over a foot tall.

Blueberries have fewer pest problems than most other fruit and thrive on organic fertilizers.

Blueberries benefit from cross-pollination. Plant at least two to three varieties for best yields. Well-maintained blueberry bushes remain productive for at least 15 to 20 years.

Site Selection

The ideal blueberry orchard has the following characteristics:

- A soil pH of 4.0 to 5.0 for good plant growth; the plants will not live in soils with a pH above 5.5
- Soil with good drainage and high organic matter
- Full sun or up to 50% shade or minimum 6 hours of sunlight. Yields are reduced with increasing shade
- Access to water - hose, drip irrigation, or hand watering to supplement rainfall



You can create the ideal location through soil amendments and good planning.

Preparing the Planting Site

Good planting site preparation is key to getting your blueberry bushes started on a long healthy life. These plants appreciate good drainage and organic matter. Shredded pine bark or peat moss are the best sources of organic matter and are naturally acidic. Mix well wetted peat moss with an equal amount of sand for good drainage. Work the organic matter as thoroughly and as deeply as possible into the planting spot prior to planting.

In low, flat planting areas, heavy clay soil or soils that sometimes remains wet, form raised beds with a peat-sand mixture placed on the soil surface. Form a mound for a single plant or a ridge for a row of plants at least 6 inches above the soil surface. The mound or ridge will insure against damage from excess water.

Planting

Space plants 6 feet apart for individual plants; 4 feet apart for a hedge. Space rows 10 to 12 feet apart. Water thoroughly 2 to 3 times per week during dry periods as the raised peat-sand mix can dry out quickly.

Plant potted blueberry bushes to the same depth as the plants were growing in the nursery if organic mulch will be applied. When planting without mulch (not recommended), plant 1 to 2 inches deeper to allow for soil settling. Firm the soil around the plant and water thoroughly.

Plan to add plants that encourage pollinating insects around your blueberry orchard area. Promoting natural nesting areas around your orchard provides enough pollinators during full bloom to insure good cross-pollination.

Mulching and Cultivation

Mulching blueberry plantings is the best form of weed and moisture control. Pine needles and/or pine bark make excellent mulches for blueberries. Provide a deep mulch approximately 3 to 4 inches deep and extend it at least 2 feet from the crown of the plant. Few weed problems should develop if mulch is applied at planting and replaced at the rate of 1 inch per year. If row middles are in sod, mow often to reduce invasion by rhizome grasses and weed seeds sprouting in the mulched area.

The plants' feeder roots are very close to the surface and do not have root hairs. If you must remove weeds, hand weed or hoe no more than approximately 1 inch deep. Cultivate often (once every 2 weeks) when weeds are germinating to reduce competition with bush growth. Remove weeds when they are small to prevent disturbing the blueberry bush roots.

Harvesting



Blueberries should be allowed to ripen on the bush. Don't pick the berries until they are fully ripe or the fruit will be bitter. The fruit of most varieties will ripen over a 4 to 6 week period. A normal season can extend from late May to mid August depending on the varieties planted. Once the berries begin to ripen, pick every 5 to 7 days. Birds are the primary pests.

A mature bush can produce 15 lbs of berries. It is recommended that you not wash blueberries until you are ready to use them in order to keep the 'bloom.'

To freeze fresh blueberries, do not wash them, put them onto a cookie sheet and place in the freezer. Once frozen, put them in plastic freezer bags or containers. No need to defrost blueberries to use them in baking. If you are using the frozen blueberries uncooked, but it's best to thaw them slowly in the refrigerator and drain well.

Dried blueberries retain many nutrients and are a wonderful addition to fruit salads and hot or cold cereals. Sprinkle dried blueberries on salads for added color and nutrition.

Pruning

Blueberries require little pruning. Pruning new bushes is recommended only to remove any dead or dying parts of branches. Lower limbs can be thinned out to keep the fruit from touching the soil and to accommodate cultivation or mulching. Spindly, weak and dead branches should be thinned out annually while they are dormant in late winter and before the buds swell. Proper pruning should be done to maintain an adequate number of vigorous main stems, to prevent overbearing, and to stimulate new shoot growth. Excessive pruning should be avoided because it greatly reduces the crop for that year.

Fertilization

Poor vigor and leaf discoloration often indicate lack of fertilizer. Generally one application in the spring of an acid-producing fertilizer each year will be sufficient. Fertilizing late in the season will encourage growth in the late fall, which can cause winter injury. Do not apply excessive amounts of fertilizer. Distribute fertilizer evenly within the root zone and avoid concentrating fertilizer near the crown of the plant.

Blueberries are very sensitive to commercial fertilizer. Broadcast organic fertilizers evenly around the plant before applying mulch in late winter.

Watering/Irrigation

Blueberry bushes require attention to watering since the root systems are shallow, usually less than 18 inches deep. Water is especially important during the long fruit-ripening period. Blueberry bushes need at least 1 to 2 inches of water per week which can be applied by sprinkler, drip irrigation, hand watering or rainfall. Do not apply water after early September unless soil is very dry.

Reddened foliage, wilting, browning leaf margins, thin, weak shoots, early defoliation, and decreased fruit set are often symptoms of inadequate moisture.

Varieties Available from Windcrest Farm - 2010

Name	Variety	Produces	Description	Pot Color Code**
O'Neal	Southern Highbush	Early Season	O'Neal is a vigorous, semi-upright, productive, fruit very large, medium blue, excellent firmness, picking scar and flavor. Blooms and ripens over an extended period.	Yellow
Star	Highbush	Early Season	Star is named for the calyx of the fruit which resembles the shape of a star so is very attractive both in the market and on the table. Star produces a large fruit with excellent firmness. Resists root and leaf diseases and stem blight. High tolerance to summer heat	No color
Premier	Rabbiteye	Mid Season	Premier berries are very large, light blue and a high quality fruit that is picked during the early rabbiteye season. It's bright green foliage during the summer makes Premier a wonderful ornamental hedge. Fast grower.	Orange
Legacy	Highbush	Mid Season	Legacy plants are vigorous, grow upright and are productive. Its berries are of medium size and firm, and are superior in scar and flavor. The outstanding characteristics of Legacy are good yields of high-quality fruit ripening in late midseason. Self pollinator.	Pink
Powder Blue	Rabbiteye	Late Season	Powder Blue has reliable crops of large berries because of its spring frost resistance. The light blue, firm fruit hang in clusters, resist cracking and hold a sweet flavor. The shrub is vigorous and upright. Ripens in mid-late season.	White
Brightwell	Rabbiteye	Late Season	Brightwell is vigorous, upright, and an excellent producer. Fruit are medium in size with a small dry scar and good flavor. It is one of the best rabbiteye variety currently available. It has been highly productive as far south as Gainesville, FL.	Gold

** To help us identify the blueberries varieties in the field, each plant's pot is marked with a color dot of paint. If you have lost the variety identification tag that came with your Windcrest Farm blueberry plant, you can identify which varieties you have by using this color code.