



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. We recommend [Mary's Mineral Mix for Blueberries](#) or [Windcrest Farm Compost Complete for Blueberries](#).

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.

Visit the [Windcrest Farm YouTube video channel for more information on planting blueberries](#).

2016	Type	Season	Tag	VARIETY / Description
	Rabbiteye	Early	Red	<p>Climax</p> <p>Climax is a high yielder of dark blue, high quality large berries. The bush is similar in size to Premier but has a more spreading growth habit. Berries tend to ripen uniformly in the early rabbiteye season.</p>
	Southern Highbush	Early	Orange	<p>O'Neal</p> <p>O'Neal is a vigorous, semi-upright, productive bush. The fruits are very large, medium blue, excellent firmness, picking scar and flavor. Blooms and ripens over an extended period.</p>
	Rabbiteye	Mid	Green	<p>Premier</p> <p>Premier berries are very large, light blue and are a high quality fruit. It's bright green foliage during the summer makes Premier a wonderful ornamental hedge. Fast grower.</p>
	Rabbiteye	Mid	White	<p>Tifblue</p> <p>Tifblue is the most universally outstanding rabbiteye blueberry grown to date. The fruits are large and light blue. Plants are vigorous, upright, and productive. Tifblue is more cold hardy than most rabbiteye blueberries varieties.</p>
	Southern Highbush	Late	Light Blue	<p>Legacy</p> <p>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 mid to late season.</p>
	Rabbiteye	Late	Lavender	<p>Powder Blue</p> <p>Powder Blue Blueberry bushes are high yielding blueberry plants with large berries that are light blue with a soft dusting that resembles powder. These berries hang in clusters and have a wonderfully sweet blueberry flavor. Powder Blue is adaptable to different soil types and long lived. Powder Blue leaves are very ornamental.</p>



MARY'S MINERAL MIX FOR BLUEBERRIES

"Feed the soil, that feeds the plant, that feeds you"

Add "Compost Complete for Blueberries with Mary's Mineral Mix" to re-mineralize the soil. The vermicompost in "Compost Complete" adds beneficial microorganisms to the soil to make the best use of soil amendments.

MARY'S MINERAL MIX - A long acting, slow release soil amendment that contains:

Alfalfa Meal, Certified Organic (4-3-.7 + minerals)

Slow acting all purpose soil amendment. An alternative to blood meal as a source of nitrogen, balanced with phosphorus and potassium. An excellent soil conditioner because of its protein and carbohydrates that encourage microbial action in soil. Has an excellent carbon to nitrogen ratio which helps speeds availability in the soil to plants.

Kelp, Certified Organic (1-0-2)

Kelp Meal contains 60 trace minerals and an assortment of amino acids, enzymes, and alginates that feed and stimulate the necessary microorganisms in your soil. A healthy, active microbial population will breakdown organic material and improve the quality and texture of the soil.

Calphos™ (0-3-0)

Calphos™ is a natural, untreated soft phosphate with colloidal clay containing valuable minor minerals in addition to phosphorus. It is not acid forming, will not cake or harden and spreads easily.

When applied to the soil Calphos™ adheres to and becomes a part of the soil. It will not leach and it will not revert and once applied remains in the soil until used by the plants. Calphos™ contains no harmful acids and encourages growth of soil bacteria and earthworms.

Greensand(0-0-3)

Greensand is mined from deposits of minerals that were originally part of the ocean floor. Contains about 3% total potash, along with iron, magnesium, silica and as many as 30 other trace minerals. May also be used to loosen heavy, clay soils. Improves plant health.

Gypsum

Gypsum contains calcium which plays a major role in the physiology of the plant by strengthening the plant's physical structure and helping develop protection from diseases. In the soil, calcium aids in the reduction of soil compaction and provides a better environment for beneficial bacteria. Some research even suggests that calcium plays a role in reducing weed populations.

Azomite

The "A to Z of minerals" including trace elements. Contains a broad spectrum of over 70 metabolically active minerals and trace elements.

HOW TO USE: Mix thoroughly and distribute evenly between two blueberry bushes. Work into the top 1" of soil or into the planting hole. This long acting, slow release soil amendment is utilized by plants through the microorganisms in the vermicompost and soil acids, not by water. Therefore it will not leach away or burn plants, but must be thoroughly mixed with the soil for best results.