



## Blueberries Brochure

Highbush blueberries can be grown in the Southern Interior but in order to be successful, home gardeners must provide two conditions:

1.	Blueberries must have an acid soil with a pH of 4.5 to 5.5 (soils in the Southern Interior tend to be neutral or alkaline), and
2.	Blueberries benefit from a thick organic mulch layer on top of the soil around the plants. Blueberries can usually be grown where peaches are successful. They should not be grown where winter temperatures drop below -27°C (-15°F). As well as the fruit, blueberry bushes have ornamental value (fall color).

If blueberries are as winter hardy as indicated, why are they only recommended where peaches grow?

The reason is that blueberry fruit buds are less hardy than the bushes and can be damaged or killed by low winter temperatures. A good blanket of snow helps to insulate the fruit buds.

### VARIETIES - in order of ripening

EARLIBLUE	<i>Early:</i> Bush is upright, moderately vigorous, easy to grow. Avoid poorly drained soil and frost pockets. Fruit is medium large, light blue, on loose clusters. Good flavor and quality
DUKE	<i>Early:</i> Bush is upright and open. Vigorous can production. Prune heavily to maintain fruit size. Blooms late, produces early and consistently. Heavy producer. Fruit is medium-sized, light blue, and firm.
REKA	New Zealand introduction. <i>Early</i> , upright, very vigorous, heavy production. Grows well on a wide range of soil types. Fruit is medium sized, firm, in loose clusters.
SPARTAN	<i>Early:</i> Upright bush and open. Moderate vigor and production. Blooms late and ripens early. Fruit is very large, light blue, and firm. Excellent fresh quality and flavor.
PATRIOT	Hardy to -29°F (-34°C). Zone 3. Upright, very vigorous, but slow growing. Branches bend under heavy snow loads. Blooms <i>early</i> so may be susceptible to late spring frosts. Heavy producer. Large berries with good flavour. Matures a few days earlier than Northland.
NORTHLAND	<i>Early July.</i> Spreading. Produces heavy crops. Berries medium sized with good flavor. Ripens a few days before Bluecrop. Hardy to -25°F (Zone 3).
BLUECROP	<i>Midseason:</i> The most popular variety. Bush is vigorous, upright, and easy to grow. Berries are large and firm with good mild flavour but tart and half red if picked too early.
HARDYBLUE	<i>Midseason:</i> (1613-A) Heavy producer, medium sized berries. Ripens with or later than Bluecrop. Spreading medium height bush, very hardy. (Zone 4).
BLUEGOLD	<i>Midseason to Late:</i> Compact and spreading bush shape. Very productive. Produces large, medium blue, firm fruit with good flavour.
CHANDLER	<i>Midseason to Late:</i> Moderately vigorous, slightly spreading bush. Berries are very large, medium firmness and colour berries. fruit ripens over a very long period. Winter tender. (Hardy to Zone 5).
BLUEJAY	<i>Midseason:</i> Unusually vigorous, medium sized, upright bush, slightly spreading. Pollinate with Northland. Medium sized berries, mild flavour, ripening slightly earlier than Northland. Hardy to Zone 4.

BLUERAY	<i>Early Midseason:</i> Ripens mid-season. Hardier than Bluecrop. Excels in marginal blueberry growing areas. Does well in hot climates. Spreading bush. Large firm sweet fruit. Excellent Quality.
RUBEL	<i>Late Season:</i> This variety is one of the first named blueberry varieties selected from the wild. Upright, medium vigor bush produces small berries with excellent flavour.
JERSEY	<i>Late Season:</i> Berries ripen from mid-August until first frost. Large, upright, and Hardy bush. Berries are small, firm, in loose clusters, and have fair flavour. -30°F (-35°C).

#### VERY HARDY BLUEBERRIES

NORTHBLUE	Ripens mid-July. Hardy to -35°F (-39°C). Low growing bush with moderate yields. Berries medium sized. Superior flavour, pollinate with Northcountry.
NORTHCOUNTRY	Medium sized berries. Sweet, mild berries produced on low bushes. Hardy to -35°F (-39°C). Fruit ripens five days before Northblue.
NORTHSKY	Low growing bush with dense branches. Hardy to -40°F (-40°C). The hardest Blueberry. Fruit is small to medium sized with excellent flavour.

There are other older and new varieties.

#### SOIL AND FERTILIZER

Before you plant blueberries, it is recommended that you have your soil tested so that you know whether it is alkaline, neutral or acidic. The results of your soil test will tell whether you need to apply sulphur to make your soil acidic and how much sulphur to apply. Sulphur should be worked into your soil at least 3 months before planting. Many people think that blueberries grow best in bogs. This is not so. Blueberries will not tolerate 'wet feet'. Soils should be light, well drained and well supplied with organic matter. Blueberries do not do well in heavy clay soils. Soils in the Southern Interior are chronically low in organic matter and nitrogen. Minor elements, such as: magnesium, boron, and zinc are often low as well. Regular fertilizer or commercial mixes specifically designed for blueberries may be used. Place fertilizers no closer than 8" (20cm) from the plant.

#### PLANTING

Plant blueberry bushes 3' -5' (0.9m-1.5m) apart. Rows should be about 10' (3m) apart. Remove the plant from the plastic pot. A shovel or two of peat moss placed in the hole at planting will get the plants off to a good start. Set the plant in the hole and replace the topsoil around the plant. Make sure that the upper roots are 1"-2" (2.5cm - 5.0cm) below the soil surface.

#### MULCHING

Mulch with sawdust, peat moss, or compost, to a depth of 3"-4" (7.5cm - 10cm) around each bush. This will control most germinating weeds, conserve soil moisture, and increase organic matter over time. More nitrogen fertilizer will be required if sawdust is used and mouse problems may increase.

#### PRUNING

Plants less than 5 years old require little pruning besides removing weak growth and shaping the bush. From the sixth year on, one or two of the oldest canes should be removed each year. These should

be cut off at ground level. Thin out the bush to admit light and permit air circulation and remove weak wood. Summer pinching of new growth may be practiced to produce compact plants.

#### POLLINATION

Most blueberry varieties are self-fertile, but having more than one variety will result in larger crops and bigger berries.

#### PEST CONTROL

Birds are the worst pest of blueberries. Netting is the only good control. For bird and other pest control check the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food publication "Pest Control for the Home & Garden".

#### BLUEBERRIES AS ORNAMENTALS?

Why not! Blueberry bushes have white flowers in the spring. Leaves are shiny green and turn red in the fall. In the winter, most shoots are red-coloured. One blueberry variety, Tophat, has been developed to be specifically an ornamental plant. It's a low bush, dwarf variety that grows 2 feet high and about the same width after 3-4 years. The berries are medium-large, firm, sweet, light blue, good flavour, and last for several weeks. In the spring, the plants are completely covered with white flowers. Foliage turns blazing crimson in the fall. A perfect plant for growing in a pot on a patio or balcony.

*Thanks to John Price, P.Ag., Horticulturist*