

BLUEBERRIES



The blueberry bush is a pretty plant all year long, displaying long-lasting white flowers in spring, green leaves with blueberries in summer, and red foliage in autumn. Because blueberries are in the same plant family (Vaccinium) as cranberry, bearberry, huckleberry, lingonberry, and bilberry, a combination of these makes for a good permaculture guild—a grouping of plants that all enjoy the same conditions.

ENJOYING THE FRUIT

Blueberries are one of the local joys of summer. Fresh off the bush, they are delicious alone or can be sprinkled on salads, cereal, or yogurt, or blended into a smoothie.

Cooked, blueberries can be enjoyed in countless ways: in pancakes, muffins and breads, pies, jams, sauces, and more.

Blueberries are a good source of nutrients including vitamin C, vitamin K, manganese, and potassium. Like other berries, blueberries don't spike blood sugar as much as other fruits and provide needed fiber. They're one of the best natural sources of antioxidants.



CHOOSING A SITE

Blueberries need full sun—no skimping! The ideal soil is well-drained but moist sandy loam soil with pH of 4.5–5.2. If your soil is too sandy or heavy with silt or clay, add sphagnum peat moss, which lightens up and helps acidify the soil; you can substitute well-decomposed wood chips.

PLANTING

Dig a shallow but wide hole, 1 foot deep by 3 feet wide. After adding the plant, fill in the hole with the following mixture:

- Half top soil from the hole
- Half coconut coir, premoistened
- 1/2 cup sulfur
- 1 cup bone meal
- 2 cups greensand, which is rich in iron

Sprinkle 1/2 cup of sulfur on top of the soil to adjust the pH. Mulch heavily with pine needles and/or wood chips.

TAKING CARE: WATERING, FEEDING, PRUNING

About a month after planting, spread a nitrogen-rich fertilizer; coffee grounds work well.

Mulch is paramount for blueberries. Mulch materials can include leaf mold, pine needles, wood shavings, and partly decomposed wood chips.

Blueberries will require pruning, but not at first. The goals of pruning are to establish a balance of canes (or main stems) of different ages, to remove nonproductive wood, and to allow good airflow to minimize pest and disease problems. Don't prune for the first two years, but do pop off the blossoms. In the late winter of year 3, cut away any deadwood or crossed branches.

AVOIDING PESTS AND DISEASE

Blueberry bushes aren't prone to significant pests or disease. But birds and small mammals will like the berries as much as you do. You can create a structure to support nets over the plants to keep our wildlife friends from taking all the berries.

HARVESTING

Pick blueberries when they are fully ripe, because they won't ripen off the bush. Blueberries are a dark inky blue when ready to harvest.

RESTORING WILDLIFE HABITAT

Blueberries bushes are good pollinator plants for bees and other insects. The dense shrubs can provide nesting habitat for songbirds and protection for small animals like rabbits, in addition to providing a wildlife food source.

