

Blueberries

Northern highbush blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) are a type of blueberry that grow well in the Pacific Northwest. All blueberries are self-fertile but cross-pollination with another cultivar increases yield. All Northern Highbush blueberries are compatible with each other for cross-pollination. Selecting cultivars with different harvest times will extend your harvest season. In the PNW, fruit production generally begins in early-mid July depending on the weather conditions and continues until September.

Planting Preparation: Blueberries require full sun (minimum 6-8 hours) and like other acid loving plants, such as rhododendrons and azaleas, do best in soil with a pH between 4.5-5.5. To prepare the planting site, mix in ample amount of organic matter such as peat moss, aged manure and compost throughout the whole planting area, not just in each planting hole. Blueberries have a shallow root system and benefit from an annual application of compost or sawdust as a mulch to help retain moisture throughout the summer. They need a lot of growing space. In general, blueberry plants grow 6 to 7 feet tall and need to be spaced 4 to 6 feet apart.

Watering: Blueberries require well-draining soil with even moisture throughout the summer for best fruit production. The use of soaker hoses on a timer makes this task easy. Run the soaker hoses along the front and back of each plant for even moisture distribution.

Fertilization: Blueberries are heavy feeders and require fertilization in the early spring, early and mid summer with a high nitrogen fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) or E.B. Stone Organic Rhody, Azalea & Camelia Fertilizer (6-4-3). Apply fertilizer three times during the growing season beginning in early Spring, early Summer and mid-Summer. Always follow the instructions on the bag.

Pruning: Every February or March, prune out any dead wood and thin the older, gray colored stems. Two & three year old stems are the most productive.

Pests: Blueberries are relatively pest free, but birds love the berries as much as you do. You will want to cover your plants with netting overhead. Don't put netting down the sides of your plants as birds can get tangled in the netting.

Harvesting: The berries don't ripen all at the same time. Check your plants daily and harvest as berries are ready. Ripe berries should come off the stem easily.

Additional reading:

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/pnw-656-blueberry-cultivars-pacific-northwest>
https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2069/2022/02/RACK-CARD-Fertilizing-Blueberries-2_7_2022-ONE-COPY.pdf