

Small Fruits and Berries

Blueberries

These plants are easy to grow, relatively pest free and need little maintenance. The plant has white flowers in the spring, followed by delicious blue colored berries in summer, and a bright crimson fall color.

For best results, blueberries require 6 to 8 hours of sunlight. They also need an acid, fertile soil. Peat moss or humus can be added to your existing soil. The area must be well drained. Two varieties should be planted to give best fruit yields. Blueberries require a soil pH of 4.5 to 5.5. When adjusting your soil, recommend rates of 24lbs of granulated sulphur per 1000 sq. ft. will lower your pH one full point.

Set plants 3' apart with a 6 foot spacing between each row. If plants produce flowers the first year, these should be removed to establish good roots and shoots. Mulch soil with shredded bark mulch or pine needles.

After plants are established, pelletized sulfur added to each plant as a side dressing will help keep the soil acidic.

Plants should be fertilized 3 times a year:

1. At bud break
2. Blossom drop
3. 2 weeks after blossom drop

Apply a half a cup of 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 per bush. This is for established plants (second year in the ground). Do not use bone meal, as this tends to sweeten the top soil.

Harvest berries 4 to 6 days after the berry turns completely blue. Pick berries once a week or more frequently during high temperatures. Cover plants with garden netting to keep birds from eating your crop.

Pruning Mature Bushes

If well-grown bushes were started as healthy 2 year old plants, they may be considered mature bushes after 6 to 8 growing seasons in the field.

After you have removed all dead and diseased wood, thin out the bush by removing 1/4 of the main branches. These can be cut at an angle lightly above

the ground level or to a low vigorous side shoot. This should be done each year, always removing the oldest canes. Branches older than 5 years are less productive. Failure to remove enough old wood, or inadequate fertilization, will result in an insufficient number of new branches arising from the base of the bush.

After cutting out the main branches, thin the remainder of the bush, removing twiggy or busy growth clusters, weak lateral shoots and interfering branches. Unpruned bushes degenerate into a thick, twiggy mass of unfruitful wood.

Red Currant

Outstanding hardiness best describes this plant. Flowers are white in the springtime and produce juicy, scarlet berries.

Plant in moist, but well drained soil. Add peat moss and bone meal at time of planting. Space 4' apart.

Allow the best two of each year's young shoots to remain. Cut and remove all the others down to the base shortly after midsummer so as to concentrate all the vigor of the plant to selected stems. These stems begin to bear the second season; increase their yield the third and reach their maximum fourth. Cut out the old canes after their third crop (at the end of the summer). This method restricts the number left after summer pruning to a maximum of eight stems. Harvest June to mid-July. If birds become a problem, cover plants with netting to help keep them out.

Gooseberry

Bushes are exceedingly hardy, and produce well in colder climates. Medium sized pale green berries are borne on 2 to 3 year old wood.

These plants prefer rich, fertile, well drained soil. Plant 3 to 4 feet apart, which will help plants cross pollinate and facilitate fruit picking. Add bone meal at time of planting, half a cup per plant.

Each year several remove shoots grow from the base of the bush; if allowed to remain they reduce the quantity and lower the flavor of the berry; therefore all but

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the two sturdiest should be removed. All stems that have borne 3 times should be cut out after harvest as they will produce very little fruit.

Harvest fruit in mid-July. Both gooseberry and currant are best not planted near white pines.

Blackberries

Tall, upright plants with thorny stems. An excellent home garden fruit because home grown berries can be picked at the time of full ripeness. Fruits are very juicy and have a delicious flavor.

They thrive in well-drained clay loam soils liberally supplied with peat moss and moisture. They are self-pollinating.

Best planted in spring, 3' apart from each other and in rows 8' wide. Provide some type of mulch to keep in moisture and keep weeds to a minimum.

Avoid high nitrogen fertilizers.

When young shoots reach 30 to 36" tall, pinch off by one-half to promote a low branching pattern, so staking would not be required. The following spring, shorten branches to 18" while plants are still dormant. After harvest of berries, prune out old stems as fruit is produced in new wood. This also helps reduce diseases by letting in light and air.

Fruit should be fully ripened but firm when harvested. Pick often and early in the day. Avoid bruising the fruit.

Raspberries

Erect plant with arching stems which tip root as they touch the ground. The berries themselves are very juicy and desirable; often used as dessert fruit. Excellent for canning, jams, juices, or just eating fresh. Many colors are available including red, black, purple. Black and red raspberries should not be planted together.

Raspberries require a slightly alkaline soil with a pH reading of 6.0 or higher. They do very well in this area without adjusting the soil pH. Before planting, add

humus or composted cow manure to the soil. They like sun and moisture.

As you plant your bushes, set them so that the crown is at the soil level with the roots just under the surface. Space plants 3 feet apart in rows 6 feet apart. All are self-pollinating.

Bone meal can be added at the time of planting and mixed into existing soil, 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 cup per bush.

PRUNING:

Red Raspberries - Prune young canes back to 4 to 5' in spring. Remove all weak canes, leaving only 8 to 9 of the stronger ones. In autumn, after harvesting is over, remove old canes and weak new ones.

Black and Purple Raspberries - When new shoots are 18 to 20" tall, snip off the tips (3 to 4"). This results in vigorous side branching.

EVERBEARING

These bear fruit twice a year on the same cane. Do not prune after the fall crop as this will remove fruiting wood for the spring crop. Removal of two year old and damaged or weakened canes is required after harvest.

Fall Gold (yellow) - Very sweet berries. Best for eating fresh.

Heritage (red) - Heavy yields of sweet juicy fruits. Main harvest in early July continues to hard frost.

STANDARD BEARING:

Fruit is produced on canes for just a limited space of time. This is good for growers who use the fruit for canning and preserving.

Canby (red) - Large, firm sweet berries; good for freezing. Semi-thornless.

Latham (red) - Large crops of big, delicious berries with small seeds. Ripens in June and bears for 3 to 4 weeks.

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Strawberries

Large, deep red, mid-season berries are firm and uniform in size. Good for baking, desserts, freezing or just eating fresh. They are vigorous, productive and disease resistant. One of the most rewarding crops for the home gardener.

Plant 18" apart from center of one plant to the next. A flat of 24 plants will cover 38' of row. They are self-pollinating. Best planted in a sunny well-drained area, high in organic matter. Add composted cow manure and mushroom compost to your soils before planting to ensure good fruit production. Never plant in an area that floods or a gutter empties into as this will cause root rot of the plants and inferior fruits. Best planted in the spring in areas where tomatoes, potatoes or eggplants have not been grown the prior season.

Feed with either 5-10-10 or 13-13-13. One pound per 80 sq. ft. of bed. Brush fertilizer off of the leaves to avoid leaf burn. If you prefer to use organics then 4 pounds of cottonseed meal per 25' of row is recommended. Mulch plants to help maintain moisture and cut down on weed development.

HILL SYSTEM

Plantings are made either in double or triple rows with plants 10 to 12" apart. Cut off runners that appear the first summer. This is often used where you have limited space.

SPACED ROW SYSTEM

Set plants 18 to 24" apart in rows, with a 42" space between rows. Runners are trained by hand so they are 6 to 8" apart. Save only one half the number runners. Discard the others.

MATTED ROW SYSTEM

Spacing is the same as in the prior system, but there is no runner training, hence less weeding, although individual plants will be more crowded and fruit size will be smaller. Allow runners to be produced until you have a solid bed of plants. Try to keep plants 2 to 3" apart and beds 18 to 24" wide. In late summer, thin plants to 3 to 4" apart. Remove all extra runners while cultivating.

Weather conditions determine frequency of picking. Warm temperatures cause berries to ripen faster. Picking every day is better, giving you more berries and less waste. Fruit is firmer earlier in the day. Rain or cloudy days will not stop fruit from ripening. If picked berries are dirty, chill for an hour or two, then wash in cold water.

STRAWBERRY JARS

Potting soils are best used, as top soil will dry out and turn concrete-like in no time at all. These plants must overwinter inside, preferably in the basement or unheated garage. Keep soil moist during the winter but not wet.

Grapes

These fruits are popular and extensively grown. They are easy to work with, bear early and regularly and are long lived with a span of 50 years or more. They are grown for juices, jelly, eating fresh or for wine making. Select a sunny spot with normal well-drained garden soil. Dig a hole big enough to give the roots plenty of room. Plant slightly deeper than it grew in the pot. Fill hole and add one part peat moss to the existing soil. Also work in bone meal (one cup per plant). Water as needed. Prune back to 2 to 3 buds. Train to a stake during first summer, pinching all side shoots to 2 leaves each. If planting more than one vine, space them 8' apart in the row with the rows 10' apart from each other. Feeding the vines depends on the fertility of your soil. An over fertilized soil produces large leaves, but very little fruit. Avoid high nitrogen fertilizers. If soil is poor then yearly applications of equal parts potassium and phosphorus can be worked into the soil when new growth starts. Removal of weeds and grass around vines helps to keep competition for nutrients low and keep disease from starting. Mulching plants with bark mulch will help maintain a water retentive soil.

Begin training in autumn of your vine's first season, after it is dormant. Choose the strongest looking cane and tie it with twine to the top wire. If the vine didn't grow that high, the plant is building up its root system.

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In the dormant period following the second or third growing season (usually around February 1st) choose 4 of the strongest canes for arms. Leave about 10 buds along the length of each arm, and leave the very tip of each arm; remove all other buds and tie each arm to the horizontal wire. Near each arm source, leave one or two buds for future arms in the succeeding years.

Harvesting is sometimes just a matter of judgement on your part. Color of the fruit is a poor indicator of ripeness. Instead look for:

- 1) taste
- 2) seeds (green-unripe,brown-ripe)
- 3) change in stem color from green to brown.

Grapes do not ripen off the vine. When picking grapes it is best to use a pruner or sharp pair of scissors. Pulling them off by hand results in tom stems and crushed fruit.