



Urban Harvest
Gardening for good.

Blueberries

Category:	Temperate; partly deciduous
Hardiness:	Easily withstands freezes
Fruit Family:	Shrub fruit; true berry
Light:	Full sun; will tolerate light shade for part of the day
Size:	12'-15'H x 8'-10'W average if unpruned; control HxW by pruning; Southern Highbush varieties are generally smaller than Rabbiteye varieties
Soil:	Moist, well-drained, high organic content required
Planting:	Container grown blueberries may be planted year round with proper care

If you provide the proper soil and irrigation, blueberries are one of the easiest fruits to grow in southeast Texas. One plant will provide an abundant crop for several weeks. They are easy to freeze by laying them in a single layer on a cookie sheet in the freezer. Once frozen, they can be put in a freezer bag for easy storage.

Pollenizer Pairings: There are two classifications of blueberries that will perform in the Houston area; Rabbiteyes and Southern Highbush. Southern Highbush varieties are generally self-fertile, but will be more productive if two or three varieties are planted in proximity. Rabbiteye varieties generally require a pollenizer; plant two or more varieties to insure a crop. Southern Highbush cannot be counted on to pollenize Rabbiteyes and vice versa. Southern Highbush produce several weeks before Rabbiteyes. The longest harvest can be obtained by planting two or more of each classification.

Care of Blueberry Plants



Planting: Blueberries have a shallow, fibrous root system. Their roots lack the root hairs required to seek water and nutrients efficiently and they can easily dry out and suffer major dieback during dry spells in our hot summer sun. The soil they thrive in must be able to hold a lot of consistent moisture, but never become water-logged. To provide these conditions, it is necessary to provide a raised bed composed of nearly 100% **high quality** organic soil.

Allow a 4'-6' wide planting area for each bush. Remove the soil 12" deep from this area. Add several inches of expanded shale into the bottom of the planting hole and till or spade in. This will improve the internal drainage of the planting site.

Mix nearly equal amounts of shredded sphagnum peat moss, shredded pine bark mulch, and leaf mold compost in sufficient amounts to not only fill the planting hole, but to raise the bed 8" – 12" above

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grade. This will result in a bed of improved soil 20"-24" deep. Water the prepared bed well and allow it to settle for a few days to a week. Plant the blueberry in the middle of the prepared bed, making sure that the finished soil level at the base of the plant is no deeper than it was in the nursery container; water in with compost tea or seaweed extract. Apply a mulch of pine straw or pine bark mulch.

Blueberries can be grown quite successfully in containers. Use a 25-30 gallon container and a planting mix comprised of the same components listed above. Mix expanded shale into the planting mix to provide drainage and preserve pore spaces.

Pruning: Blueberries do not require heavy pruning. Pruning is generally not required for the first two years, except to remove dead wood or stems that touch or rub each other. On young shrubs, tip the stems back to keep the bearing wood at a convenient height for harvesting and thin the shoots to keep the center of the shrub open and the bearing wood accessible. As the shrubs age, remove approximately 20% of the older, grayer stems all the way to the base each year. This will stimulate the production of new canes from the base. Continue to head back the tops to a convenient height and prune out thin, spindly growth near the base of the shrub. Prune immediately after the harvest is completed. Do not prune in late winter with other temperate fruits. The fruiting buds form on the tips of the branches, and tip pruning in late winter will remove those fruit buds.

Production: Blueberries will generally begin to produce the second year after planting, but will take 4 – 5 years to reach full production. Depending on the variety of plant, you will probably get 1–2 pints of blueberries the second year. The third year you might expect 2–3 quarts, and the fourth year you should get at least 1 gallon, perhaps more depending on the size of the fruiting canopy.

Watering: The first year after planting, check soil moisture 1-2 times per week and do not let the soil go dry. Blueberries appreciate regular irrigation, but do not like soggy soils. They may require daily watering during hot, dry spells. Never water on a "schedule". Check the soil moisture frequently to maintain the "moist, well-drained" condition.

Fertilizing: Blueberry roots do not seek nutrients efficiently. They are dependent on a symbiotic relationship with mycorrhizal fungi to do this work for them. They also require a fairly acidic soil. This must be taken into account in your feeding program. Apply a slow release organic fertilizer four times a year, broadcast across the entire planting area. Do not fertilize at planting – begin the following season in late winter near bud break. Annual applications of agricultural sulfur can eventually lower pH below the desired range. Check pH before application and apply only when pH climbs above 5.5. Make annual applications of compost and maintain a mulch of shredded pine bark or pine straw at all times.

Harvesting: Blueberries are sweetest two or three days after they turn dark blue, when the fruit is slightly soft to the touch. Individual berries in a cluster do not ripen at the same time. Handpick every day, removing only the ripest berries each harvest. Blueberries do not ripen further after harvest.

Pests: Blueberries have few insect pests, but birds are a huge problem. Use a frame of wire, PVC, or wood trellises around the berries and suspend bird netting to assure a crop.

Varieties of Blueberries for the 2020 Sale

Southern Highbush: Emerald, Jewel, Rebel, Sunshine Blue

Rabbiteyes: Climax, Pink Lemonade, Premier, Tifblue

Varieties of Southern Highbush Blueberries for Southeast Texas

Southern Highbush blueberries are self-fertile, but will produce a much larger crop when 2 or 3 varieties are present. They grow to about 8' high and 4'-6' wide. If you routinely get hard freezes or light frosts in February, aim at varieties with 325 chill units or higher.

Abundance: A new and distinct Southern Highbush blueberry variety. This is a vigorous and upright bush that produces large, medium-blue berries with a very small picking scar and high firmness. High yields that ripen in early to mid-May. **400 chill hours**

Emerald: Combines a vigorous, upright, bush with high yield potential, early ripening, and high-quality berries. Fruit is very large, firm, medium blue, with excellent flavor. **250 chill hours**

Gulf Coast: Low chill blueberry with great quality berries; one of the better low chill varieties. Early ripening in April- May. **150 chill hours**

Jewel: Yields abundant crops of nickel-sized berries with a tangy flavor. Its upright habit makes it a great landscape plant. Dependable in mild-winter climates because of a low chill requirement. Long harvest period. Plant with other mid-season fruiting blueberries for best performance. **200 chill hours**

Misty: All-around "best of show" for the landscape. Flowers are touched with pink against attractive blue-green foliage. Leaves may remain evergreen in mild winters and will turn a brilliant red before falling in colder winters. Medium-large berries are sky blue and very sweet - heavy bearer. Vigorous, upright shrub, 5' – 6' tall. Heat tolerant. Self pollinizing or pollinize with any other Southern Highbush. Early variety. **300 chill hours**

Palmetto: (PP#16756) An early ripening variety, producing in early to mid-May. Medium-sized berries that are a medium blue, but very flavorful. Upright but with an open crown. Excellent vigor, making it suitable for many home gardens. **400 chill hours**

Rebel: (USPP #18138) Very early season Southern Highbush with large berry size, crisp texture, and excellent plant vigor. **400 chill hours.**

Sunshine Blue: This semi-dwarf blueberry grows to 3' with a compact, upright habit. It is the perfect selection for containers, borders, hedgerows, and small gardens. Showy, hot pink flowers that fade to white followed by large crops of delicious berries. Sunshine Blue tolerates higher pH soils better than many other blueberries. Evergreen in mild winters. Self-pollinizing or pollinize with any other Southern Highbush. Mid- to late variety. **150 chill hours**

Sweetcrisp: Highly vigorous bush with excellent field survival. Berry is firm, crisp and sweet with very low acidity. The berries are medium to large, medium dark, with an excellent scar and remarkable firmness. **200 chill hours**

Windsor: Produces a vigorous bush that is upright but somewhat spreading. Produces berries that are very large, firm, dark-blue in color, have a large and sometimes humid picking scars, and a sweet, pleasant flavor. **325 chill hours**

Varieties of Rabbiteye Blueberries for Southeast Texas

Rabbiteye blueberries prefer pollination from another Rabbiteye in order to set fruit. Although they flower at the same time, they fruit at different times, providing a long harvest season with proper selection of varieties. Without pruning, they will grow to 14 feet high. If you routinely get hard freezes or light frosts in February, aim at varieties with 325 chill hours or higher.

Austin: Large size, dark blue, sweet with outstanding flavor. Austin can be harvested from early to mid May - ripens a week before Brightwell. Pollenize with any other Rabbiteye. **450 – 500 chill hours**

Brightwell: Medium-large, light blue berry, sweet flavor. Early to mid-season ripening. Brightwell has an upright, vigorous growth and is a consistent producer. Pollenize with any other Rabbiteye. **325 chill hours**

Climax: Medium size berries, sweet flavor. Upright growth with intense green foliage. Early ripening. Berries tend to ripen all at once. Pollenize with any other Rabbiteye. **450 chill hours**

Pink Lemonade: Beautiful all year long! White flowers are tinged with pink in early spring. Pale green fruit follows and ripens from dappled pink to bright pink. Fall foliage is gold and orange, and winter twigs are a mahogany color. Fruit is sweet and delicious. Upright habit. Self-fruitful, but better when pollinized with any other Rabbiteye. **475 chill hours**

Premier: Large, light blue, good quality fruit, excellent flavor. Highly productive, upright growth, good foliage. Early to mid-season ripening. Pollenize with any other Rabbiteye. **525 chill hours**

Tifblue: Medium to large, light blue, good quality berries. Vigorous upright plants hold up well until last berries are harvested. Early to mid-season ripening. The best ornamental with good fall leaf color. Pollenize with any other Rabbiteye. **400 chill units**