

Container-Grown Blueberries

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Julia Minter, Jayla Fry, and Dr. Larry Stein

Blueberries are truly an American fruit, with several species native to North America. Blueberries need acidic soil with a pH of 4.0–5.5 to grow. Since this type of soil is mainly located in east Texas, across the state, blueberries are best grown in containers. Rabbiteye blueberry varieties are the best for Texas. Rabbiteyes are native to the southeastern United States, have few serious pest problems, and require little fertilization.

Grow it

Varieties

- In Central Texas, which receives a mid-level of chill hours, Tifblue and Climax are some of the best-adapted varieties. In South Texas, where there are a low number of chill hours, Misty and Sunshine are good varieties to choose.
- It is a good idea to plant two different varieties that bloom at the same time to ensure fruit set. Tifblue, however, is self-fertile and does not require another variety for good fruit set.

Soil Preparation

- Choose a 20- to 30-gallon container that has drainage holes in the bottom.
- Fill the container with an acidic soilless potting media, such as peat moss, composted pine bark, or a 50/50 mixture of the two. Do not use field soils.

Planting

- Buy container-grown or bare-root blueberries from a reputable nursery and plant in late winter or early spring.
- Plant plants at the same depth at which they grew in the nursery and water them well.

Pruning

- At planting, cut off the tops of plants, about one-third to one-half of the plant, and allow the plants to grow as a bush.
- Each year, during the dormant season, prune out weak or dead branches, prune back lower limbs to keep fruit from touching the soil, and prune to keep the center of the bush open.
- As the bush ages, it will form thick, gray branches. Prune out about 20 percent of these branches at ground level each year to encourage new, productive shoots.

Fertilizing

- If plants exhibit vigorous growth, apply ½ to 1 ounce of a slow-release fertilizer, like Osmocote, per plant in the summer of the planting year.
- Beginning the second year, fertilize each plant with a slow-release fertilizer at a rate of 1 ounce per year of plant age, up to a maximum of 8 ounces per plant for those 8 years old or older.
- The best times to fertilize are in late winter to early bud break or in early summer after harvest.

Watering

- Water deeply once to twice every week or when the soil is dry. If the soil media is moist, do not water.
- It is necessary to use good-quality water that does not contain high levels of calcium bicarbonate or sodium. Using rainwater or air-conditioner condensate is best.

Care During the Season

- Add a 4-inch layer of an organic mulch, such as sphagnum peat moss, pine bark, or pine needles.
- Blueberries should remain outdoors during the winter because they require cold weather in order to produce fruit. However, plants will need to be protected from late spring frosts.

Insects & Diseases

- The main pests include blueberry maggot, mummy berry, botrytis blight, and anthracnose. If something does not look right with your plant, contact your county Extension agent for more information.
- Birds are a major problem in many areas. Use bird netting to protect plants.

Harvesting

- Rabbiteye blueberries ripen unevenly within a fruiting cluster. Pick individual berries over a period of 4 to 6 weeks, every 3 to 5 days.
- The berries do not ripen further after harvest. For maximum flavor and minimal bitterness, allow fruit to ripen on the bush.



Sun:
Full



Soil:
Acidic soilless
potting media



Planting:
Late winter-
early spring



Harvest:
May-July



Life Cycle:
Perennial



Container
Friendly



Buy it

- Select fresh blueberries that are plump, firm, dry, and have a powdery blue color.¹

Store it

- Store unwashed blueberries in the refrigerator for a maximum of 10 to 14 days.² Wash berries before eating them.

Use it

Greek Yogurt Banana and Blueberry Pancakes

Course: Breakfast
Serves: 6

Ingredients:

- 1 banana, mashed
- ¼ cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup gluten-free rolled oats
- 1 medium egg
- 1 Tbsp. unsweetened almond milk
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. coconut extract
- ½ cup blueberries, fresh or frozen



Instructions:

Clean the preparation area and wash your hands.

Preheat a skillet or griddle to medium-high heat.

In a large bowl, mash the banana until completely smooth.

Combine all ingredients except blueberries and mix well. Fold in blueberries and pour into a spouted measuring cup.

Spray cooking spray over skillet and pour batter. Pour just enough to make a small ball and flatten into a round-shaped pancake using a small spoon.

Cook for about 3 minutes, until the edges are set and bubbles begin to form in the middle. Use a spatula to flip and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes.

Top with sliced bananas and blueberries and enjoy!



Blueberry Lemonade

Course: Drink
Serves: 8

Ingredients:

- 2 cups blueberries, fresh or frozen
- 6 cups water
- 2 Tbsp. agave nectar
- ½ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Mint for garnish

Instructions:

Combine blueberries and 1 cup of water in a blender until liquefied, about 1 minute.

Using a mesh strainer over the mouth of a 2-quart pitcher, pour the blueberry puree slowly to strain. Use the back of a spoon to press puree into the mesh strainer to drain liquid.

Add agave nectar into freshly squeezed lemon juice and stir well.

Pour agave nectar and lemon juice mixture into the pitcher.

Add the remaining 5 cups of water to the pitcher and stir.

Serve over ice. Add blueberries, thinly sliced lemon, or mint for garnish.

Store in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days.

Learn about it

Blueberries are popular due to their high concentration of antioxidants, which are thought to help prevent cancer and heart disease. Additionally, blueberries are low in calories and sodium, contain no cholesterol, are high in vitamin K and manganese, and are a good source of fiber, vitamin C, and copper.

¹ Have a Plant. (2022). Blueberries. Produce for Better Health Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://fruitsandveggies.org/fruits-and-veggies/blueberries/>

² Purdue University Extension. (2020). *Purdue Extension FoodLink: Blueberry*. Retrieved from: <https://extension.purdue.edu/foodlink/food.php?food=blueberry>