

Small Fruits and Berries

All of the following are easy to grow if you follow certain guidelines. Once established, they will provide you the experience of raising your own fruit. You can be the first gardener on the block to produce delicious fruit for your own home use.

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, recommended rates of 24 lbs. of granulated sulphur per 1000 sq. ft. will lower your pH one full point.

Set plants 3 feet 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



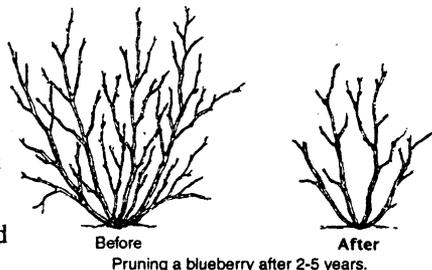
Apply a half cup of 4-6-6 or 13-13-13 (39 Plus) per bush. This is for established plants (second year in the ground). Do not use bone meal, as this tends to sweeten the top soil.

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



Pruning Mature Bushes (Continued)

the main branches. These can be cut at an angle slightly 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, this 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 Currants

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 feet 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.

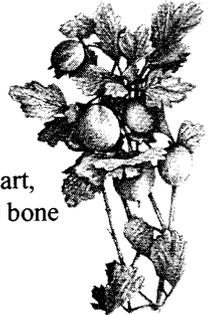
Gooseberries

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 to many 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 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 feet apart from each other and in rows 8 feet 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 inches 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 inches 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 or yellow. 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, 1/4 to 1/2 cup per bush.

Pruning:

Red and Yellow Raspberries

Prune young canes back to 4 to 5 feet 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 inches tall, snip off the tips (3 to 4 inches). 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.

Strawberries

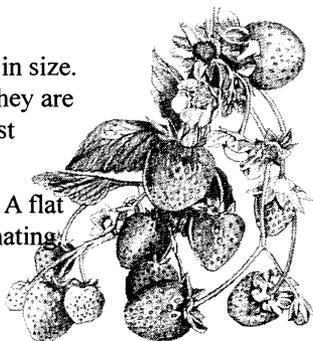
Large, deep red, mid-season berries are firm and uniform in size. Good for baking, desserts, freezing or just eating fresh. They are vigorous, productive and disease resistant. One of the most rewarding crops for the home gardener.

Plant 18 inches apart from center of one plant to the next. A flat of 24 plants will cover 38 feet 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 feet 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 inches apart. Cut off runners that appear the first summer. This is often used where you have limited space.



Strawberries (Continued)

Spaced Row System

Set plants 18 to 24 inches apart in rows, with a 42 inch space between rows. Runners are trained by hand so they are 6 to 8 inches 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 inches apart and beds 18 to 24 inches wide. In late summer, thin plants to 3 to 4 inches apart. Remove all extra runners while cultivating.

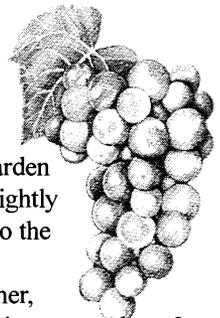
Weather conditions determine frequency of picking. Warm temperatures cause berries to ripen faster. Picking every day is better, giving you more berries and less waste. Fruit is firmer earlier in the day. Rain or cloudy days will not stop fruit from ripening. If picked berries are dirty, chill for an 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 feet apart in the row with the rows 10 feet apart from each other, especially Catawba and Concord. 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 vines 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.

Grapes (Continued)

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 torn stems and crushed fruit.

Grape Types

If you plant different varieties together they will probably cross pollinate. This does not harm the flavor of the fruit. It will, however, produce small seeds in seedless varieties. They are self-fruiting and require no pollinator.

Seedless Grapes

Most popular for eating fresh and freezing.

Concord Seedless (blue) - Sweet, smaller than regular Concord. Ripens in mid-September.

Canadice (red) - Ripens 2 weeks earlier than Concord.

Himrod (white) - Top white variety. Large clusters of sweet yellow fruits. Superior table and popular roadside market grape.

Table Grapes

Delicious for eating fresh or for juice, jellies, and jams.

Concord (blue) - Well known blue-black grape. Excellent flavor. Ripens mid-September. Used in specialty wines or any of the above.

Nets over the vines will keep fruit loss from birds to a minimum.

Asparagus

One of the earliest spring vegetables that you can grow. A well-prepared bed in good soil can produce high yield crops for many years. It can be canned or frozen for off season eating but best eaten fresh, right from the garden.

Site selection is important because it is a permanent fixture in the garden. It needs its own space. Allow 4 feet between the asparagus row and any other planting. It needs full sun and an area away from strong, gusty winds. If you have heavy clay soils, they should be preconditioned before planting. Add one third top soil and one third peat moss to your existing soil. Also, add organic materials (composted cow manure or mushroom compost) to this soil.

Now you are ready to plant. Dig a trench 12 to 15 inches wide and from 12 to 15 inches deep. Allow 4 to 5 feet between trenches. Ten plants per person is an average crop for fresh eating only. If you are planning on giving some away, canning or freezing, double that amount. Set plants in a trench, fill bottom of trench with 6 to 8 inches of compost, then two inches of top soil. Fill remainder of hole with existing soil, making sure that crown of plant is covered with two inches of soil.

During its first season, a once a week watering is necessary so that roots do not dry out. Too much water, however, is harmful, so do not let them stand in water.

In the fall, apply composted cow manure. In spring, add triple phosphate, 1 lb. per 100 sq. ft.

Avoid cutting spears until they are pencil thickness. Also, do not cut too liberally on your first cut. Three cuttings should suffice for the season. Do not cut or remove the foliage until plants have become dormant; although seeds should be removed as they form.

Weed removal around plants is best done with shallow cultivation.

Avoid cutting spears until the third spring after planting. This helps the bed to mature which will give you more to yield in the long run. You must start to harvest before the heads start to open, which often means daily harvesting. Snap or cut the asparagus at ground level. The length of the spear depends entirely on you; be aware that the taller it gets, the tougher the spear becomes. Most gardeners harvest when spears are between 5 and 8 inches tall.

Rhubarb

This plant is a hardy perennial, often living 50 years or more. It is grown for its tart reddish stalks. Three or four plants will provide plenty of stalks for most families.

Choose a spot in full sun with rich well-drained soil. Space 36 inches apart. Clear the area of any weeds. Loosen the soil to a depth of 10 inches. For each plant, mix 3-4 inches of compost or well aged manure and a handful of 13-13-13 fertilizer into the soil. Cover the crowns with an inch or two of soil. Press the soil firmly around the roots, and water well. In a few weeks, when plants are actively growing, mulch with straw to help maintain soil moisture and prevent weed seeds from germinating.

A midsummer feeding of fish emulsion or 13-13-13 fertilizer will benefit these plants and help build strong healthy roots. Snap off any flower stalks as they appear; they sap the strength of the plant. Harvest the plants lightly the second season after planting, removing a few stalks from each plant over a short session (3-4 weeks). By the third year, your harvest will have increased and you can pick up to two months. When plants start producing slender stalks, stop picking. Stalks have the best flavor when young.

Pulling the stalks from plants seems to be the best method of harvesting, as cutting sometimes leaves stubs which can become infected and cause rotting to occur.

Only eat the rhubarb stalks, as the leaves contain large amounts of oxalic acid, which is toxic. If you have a compost pile, the leaves may be safely added to it, as the process breaks down harmful quantities.

Horseradish

Grown for its pungent, white fleshed roots which are grated and used as an appetizer and condiment.

Hardy home garden crop remaining from year to year, as small roots are left in ground, while larger ones are harvested. Plants do well anywhere, but prefer full sun to part shade, and moist, well-drained soils. Plant in shallow furrows 3 feet apart. Crowns should be 4 inches below the soil surface.

Feeding plants is usually not required, unless you want very large roots in a shorter space of time. Then add compost or 5-10-10 to the soil in mid-spring.

Plants are coarse looking and best located on the corner of the garden. They can become invasive, so are best contained in areas away from frequent cultivation.

Harvesting can be done at any time of the year, but seem to be especially pungent in spring, just as new top growth starts. This is a root crop and roots can be dug up whenever you need them, although it is best to wait until the second season after planting.



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