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Fact sheet

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Selecting Blueberry Varieties for the Home Garden

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The blueberry bush makes a wonderful choice for the home gardener as a flavorful food crop or as an ornamental landscape shrub. There are several important considerations in deciding which particular varieties are best suited to the gardener's goals, planting site, and climate.

Highbush blueberry has been commercially bred over the last 100 years and has developed a large number of diverse and productive varieties. Most home gardeners will select for taste, fruit size, and color in consuming berries fresh off the bush. Others may prefer smaller, firmer, and more flavorful fruit for baking, processing, or storage. Some gardeners are selecting landscaping varieties from a bush size and color standpoint to be utilized in specimen plantings, hedging, or accent pieces. Some varieties change their blue/green foliage to a striking orange, yellow, purple, or red color in the fall. Flower colors range from white to pink in a profuse springtime display.

New Jersey encompasses three different plant growth zones; 6, 7, and 8. The cooler northern region 6 has a seasonal growing period of about 140 days from last spring frost to first fall frost, while the warmer southern region zone 8 has a much longer growing period of about 220 days. Low winter temperature in the north may range from –5° to 10°F compared to 10° to 20°F in the south. The central portion zone 7 is intermediate between these two growth zones. These climatic factors limit the culture of Rabbiteye (V*accinium ashei)* and southern highbush hybrid blueberry species. The lowbush blueberry species (V*accinium angustifolium)*, native to New England and Canada, is also not very well adapted to our more moderate climate. The best selection is the highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), our native species which is ideally suited to all three growth zones of the Garden State.



Flower clusters on blueberry bush bloom for a one to two week period.

Highbush blueberry cultivars have an inherent resistance to many diseases of fruit, flower, and foliage. If the home gardener or small farmer is situated several miles away from large commercial blueberry production areas, insect pests will seldom cause significant damage (see fact sheet, FS106, *Blueberry Pest Management for the Homeowner*).

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Nonetheless, certain varieties have been selectively bred for resistance to common diseases in our area. These characteristics may be listed on the varietal label used by the commercial nursery.

There are also choices to be made in terms of transplant size and age. Bushes may be bare-rooted or pot-grown and one, two, or three years old. One year old plants are the least expensive but will not bear fruit for two years. The fruit buds need to be stripped off by hand in order to grow more foliage and deeper roots for a more productive harvest in the fourth year. Two year old plants are much more dependable in establishment and need only one more season of non-bearing. (See fact sheet, FS750, *Establishing Blueberries in the Home Garden*.) Three year old plants are, of course, the largest and most expensive. This extra expense may make sense when only purchasing a few bushes for the home grounds in order to reach a faster harvest. Sources of certified virus and disease free blueberry plants can be found in commercial nursery catalogs, at home garden suppliers, accessed on the internet, or from your county extension offices.

Late fall planting is preferred but a March timing is acceptable. This timing is less important when the plant is containerized, which suffers less from root disturbance and transplant shock. Purchase at least two varieties and plant them close together (3–4 feet) to increase cross-pollination. While most high-bush blueberry varieties are self-fertile, all bushes benefit from exchanging pollen which increases fruit size, ripening, and yield. Another important consideration is the length of the harvest season which generally ranges from 2 to 6 weeks per cultivar. The gardener should select a mix of varieties having early, middle, and late season harvest times which can ripen in succession and cumulatively extend production periods (Chart 1).



A new variety, "Duke", is noted for large fruit and high yield.

While primary criteria for cultural choice by home gardeners are berry flavor, aroma, sweetness, and tartness; other considerations include berry size, berry color, cluster density, productivity, plant structure, bush size, vigor, and cold hardiness. Varietal information is compared in Table 1. If possible, visit your local "pick-your-own" blueberry farms several times during the season and sample all the varieties the growers have to offer.

Chart 1: Varietal Fruiting Season – Zones 6, 7, 8

Variety	May				June				July				August			
Earliblue																
Bluetta																
Blueray																
Patriot																
Duke																
Collins																
Bluecrop																
Legacy																
Coville																
Bluegold																
Herbert																
Jersey																
Lateblue																
Elliot																

Table 1: Varietal Information for the Homeowner or Small Farmer

Variety	Season	Fruit Size	Color	Plant type	Flavor	Comments
Earliblue	Very Early	Large	8	Upright/Spreading	Good	Firm, good aroma, good dessert quality
Bluetta	Very Early	Medium	5	Spreading	Mild	Soft, fair, short size
Ivanhoe	Early	Medium	7	Upright	Excellent	Firm aromatic, high dessert quality
Patriot	Early	Large	8	Upright	Very Good	Firm, aromatic, tasty, small bush
Stanley	Early	Medium	7	Upright	Very Good	Firm, aromatic, high dessert quality
Blueray	Late Early	Large	8	Spreading	Very Good	Aromatic, high dessert quality
Duke	Late Early	Large	8	Upright	Good	Firm, big bush, high yielder
Collins	Late Early	Large	8	Upright/Spreading	Good	Firm, good aroma, good dessert quality
Bluecrop	Mid Season	Large	9	Upright	Good	Firm, slightly aromatic, most popular
Berkeley	Mid Season	V Large	8	Spreading	Mild	Firm, good for storage
Concord	Mid Season	Small	6	Upright/Spreading	Excellent	Soft, slightly aromatic, good dessert quality
Pioneer	Mid Season	Medium	6	Spreading	Very Good	Firm, aromatic, high dessert quality
Atlantic	Late Mid	Large	7	Very Spreading	Very Good	Firm, slightly aromatic, medium dessert quality
Herbert	Late Mid	V Large	7	Very Spreading	Excellent	Soft aromatic, very high dessert quality
Legacy	Late Mid	Large	8	Upright/Spreading	Excellent	Firm, sweet, aromatic, stores well
Dixi	Late	Large	6	Very Spreading	Very Good	Firm, aromatic, high dessert quality
Elizabeth	Late	Large	8	Very Spreading	Excellent	Slightly acidic, aromatic, very high dessert quality
Darrow	Late	V Large	8	Upright	Excellent	Firm, slightly acidic, high dessert quality
Wareham	Late	Medium	6	Spreading	Excellent	Soft, aromatic, good dessert quality
Tophat	Late	Medium	7	Dwaft patio type	Fair	Firm, 2' tall, no pollinator needed, baking
Coville	Late	Large	7	Very Spreading	Very Good	Firm, highly aromatic, tart, very high dessert quality
Bluegold	Late	Medium	8	Upright/Spreading	Excellent	Medium, firmness, productive, winter hardy
Jersey	Very Late	Medium	6	Upright	Good	Classic taste, stores well
Late Blue	Very Late	Small	8	Upright	Very Good	Firm, strong flavor
Elliott	Very Late	Medium	8	Upright	Mild	Firm, reddish wood, good dessert quality

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