

Saturday Mornings at Shooting Star Nursery~

Strawberries and Blueberries in Containers

Blueberries are so sensitive to their soil needs that they can be difficult to grow in the ground and strawberries can end up taking up a lot of space with their runners so we are going to show you how to grow both in containers. They make a great decorative plant as well as getting to enjoy the fruit you harvest.



Blueberries~

Soil:

The key with blueberries is acidic soil with a lot of organic matter. This can be more difficult to achieve in the ground, so growing them in containers is an ideal solution.

Blueberries need a pH of 4.5-5.5

A good soil mix will have peat moss, have bark as a component, as well as be formulated for acid-loving plants (such as an azalea or rhodie mix)

A good mix will be about 1/3 of each-

- 1/4" aged bark,
- peat moss,
- bark based potting soil (for acid plants), and
- a handful of sulfur per plant

Fertilizer:

We like to use an organic fertilizer on anything we're going to eat. At the time of planting add some acid fertilizer, the amount will depend on how large a container you are using. Scratch in some fertilizer again in early and late spring as well as the fall.

Mulching and watering:

Blueberries also have shallow roots so they are sensitive to how much water they are getting. This can be remedied by making sure there is a thick layer of mulch (bark, compost, sawdust) at the base of the plant. In the heat of the summer make sure your plant doesn't get dried out. The easiest way is to add a dripline to your containers and make sure they are getting a good soak at least once a week. If the pot is drying out faster than that, it may need water more often. Test the soil by feeling the soil several inches below the mulch. If it is dried out, water more often, if it is still cool and moist, wait a little more before watering again. Blueberries don't like to be dry but they also don't want to be soggy all of the time.

Pruning:

The first year of planting, you really should snip off all the flowers so your plant concentrates on growing strong branches, not fruit. I know this sacrifices your fruit for the first year, but the plant will be better for it. You'll have that much better a harvest the following year!

Blueberries fruit on one year old wood. In the winter, prune out any dead branches or twiggy growth. Keep the healthy looking, green stems and prune out older or grey looking stems.

Varieties:

Blueberries get a better crop and larger berries by having more than one variety. You can also extend your harvest time by choosing an early, mid and late blooming variety. The more compact varieties are a good choice for smaller containers. But if you use an especially large container- 15 gallon or larger, you can use a one of the larger variety blueberries. Blueberries are long-lived so using a large container will make the most out of your time and resources.

Blueberries are highly ornamental- white flowers, beautiful fruit, and red fall color so consider a prominent location for them or a colorful decorative pot to place them in.

Here are some of **our favorites**:

- Aurora- very late harvest, into Sept.
- Bluecrop- long harvest time, disease resistant, mid season
- Bluejay- fruit holds well on plant, early season
- Chandler- some of the biggest berries we've seen!, mid season
- Darrow- known for having large berries, late season
- Duke- heavy production, early season
- Elliott- late season, into Sept.
- Legacy- semi-evergreen, vigorous, late season
- Reka- heavy production, early season
- Rubel- higher antioxidants, smaller berries- good for pies and jams, mid to late season
- Toro- easy to pick, mid season

Compact varieties:

- Bluegold- mid season
- Draper- mid season, easy to pick
- Patriot- early season, takes wet soils
- Sunshine Blue- semi-evergreen, mid season
- Top Hat- very compact, mid season

Shooting Star Nursery
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Strawberries~

Soil and Fertilizer:

Strawberries also like an acidic soil, not as extreme as blueberries. A pH of 6-6.5 is best. You can use the soil recipe for blueberries if you like and not use the peat moss if your potting mix has some and not add the sulphur, the acid potting soil and bark should be enough. You also need to use a fertilizer that is higher in potassium and phosphorus (the last two numbers on the box). We like to use an organic fertilizer like Acid Mix (4-3-6) with some All Purpose Mix (4-6-2). Fertilize again in the fall.

Planting and Watering:

Take care to not over bury your strawberry when planting. Match the soil line to about half way up the crown. I like to add some mycorrhizae to the roots when planting bare roots to inoculate the soil with good microorganisms. Water your plants in well right after planting. Strawberries also have a shallow root system so don't let them overly dry out and maintain consistent watering. They also do not like water logged soil. Adding some gravel to the bottom of your pot will help with drainage.

Varieties:

June bearing or spring crop:

These strawberries produce a heavy crop once a season, usually in June. They are usually larger berries and are a good choice if you want your berries to ripen all at once to use for preserves.

- **Rainier**- extra hardy, great fruit quality and disease resistance
- **Shuksan**-late harvest, one of the best tasting varieties, doesn't have long shelf life so unusual to see at market, best for fresh eating or freezing

Everbearing:

These strawberries produce smaller crops throughout the summer, some of them into fall. They can produce fruit the first year of planting.

- **Eversweet**- heat tolerant, long, conical fruit, produces into fall
- **Seascape**-outstanding flavor and appearance, ripens thru August

Pruning and Maintaining:

As with blueberries, it is a good idea to snip off the first flowers of everbearing strawberries and all of the first year flowers of Junebearers. This may be painful but it will make for a stronger plant and better harvest for next season.

Pinch off any runners to maintain vigor in mother plant. When planting strawberries in pots it may be necessary to start with new plants after 3-4 years. That way you can refresh the soil as well.