

July 7, 2019



Growing Blueberries and Strawberries in Containers

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You do not need a large yard to enjoy the fresh taste of homegrown strawberries and blueberries. In fact you don't need a yard at all, as both of these delicious fruits can be grown in containers on decks, patios, or even a small space in your yard. Container gardening is an ideal method of growing these fruits; it is a convenient, space saving method that cuts down on fungal and bacterial diseases and garden pests. In containers, both plants can give you a steady supply of fruit throughout the summer and even into early fall.

Strawberries are easy to start and grow in containers. Since strawberries are shallow rooted, almost any size light colored container or pot will work. Light color containers are recommended because the roots of strawberries are very sensitive to heat so a light colored container helps prevent overheating of the soil in the container. Start with a good potting soil, and space your plants about six to eight inches apart. In pot measuring less than twelve inches across you do not want to plant more than two or three strawberry plants. Remove any runners as the primary function of these is to produce another strawberry plant. You want your plant to concentrate on growing strawberries not expending energy on new plants. Since your plants are in pots watering is also very important and should be done twice a day during very hot summer days. To avoid over watering, water your plant for less time but more often. The soil should be moist but not soggy. Fertilize your strawberries about every ten days. In order to maximize your harvest you should plant a mixture of different varieties of Everbearing strawberries such as Ozark Beauty, Tillicum, and Quinault. Each variety produces berries at different times during the growing season thus ensuring a steady supply of fruit.

Growing blueberries in containers is easy if you pick the right variety of blueberry and use the correct mixture of potting soil. Northern Lowbush varieties such as Tophat, or Southern Highbush such as Sunshine Blue, Southern Patio, Northsky, Evergreen, Northblue, Berry Blueberry Glaze, and Jelly Bean are all good choices for growing in containers. All are dwarf or semi-dwarf varieties that tolerate cold winter temperatures and will produce flowers throughout the summer. When choosing a container pick one that is at least eighteen inches deep. Fill the pot two thirds of the way with regular potting soil and then fill the rest of the container with

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potting soil for acid loving plants. You should plant at least three plants in separate containers to ensure a plentiful harvest. Monitor water and soil acidity when growing blueberries in containers. Try to keep soil acidity (pH) between five to five point five. Water daily during the summer and twice daily during heat waves. Soil should be moist but not muddy. Blueberry plants are sensitive to excessive fertilizer, which can burn or even kill the plants. Finally, be patient as it will take new plants at least a year to produce fruit. Remember to cover your plant with netting to keep wildlife from consuming your crop.

On July 10, join Master Gardeners and Master Food Preservers for a fun class on berries. Master Gardeners will discuss how to grow and care for the various berry plants, and the most common diseases and pests in our area. Then Master Food Preservers will show you how to preserve your garden bounty in fun and creative ways, including jams and jellies, flavored vinegars, pie fillings, and more. This free Public Education class will be held from 9 a.m. to noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, at 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.