



# Growing Blueberries in Santa Clara County, CA

presented by UCCE Master Gardener Volunteer  
Jeff Jenks

## *Key ideas*

- Blueberries can be grown in Santa Clara County, CA, USA.
- Success in growing blueberries depends on the type, site selection, container, sun, soil, water, fertilizer, mulch, amendments, pruning, harvesting, and pests.

## **Types:**

- Southern highbush (self-pollinating)
  - Varieties: Jubilee, Emerald, Misty, Southmoon, O'Neal, Sunshine Blue, Bountiful Blue®
- Northern highbush (self-pollinating)
  - Varieties: Bluecrop, Blueray, Earliblue, Berkeley, Ozarkblue
- Rabbiteye (not self-pollinating – need two different varieties)
  - Varieties: Centurion, Climax, Woodard, Bonita, Brightwell, Tifblue
- For containers: All the above will work. blueberries can grow up to 8 feet high.

## **Site Selection**

- Minimum 6 hours of sun. But not intense heat.
- For a container on a balcony or porch, face south, east, or west. NOT north.

## **Soil requirements**

- Water retentive, well-drained acidic soils; pH 4.5–5.5.
- Containers: use acid-loving plant soil mix. Container shape is important for future up-potting.
- For planting in the ground, typical Santa Clara County clay soils: Mix soil 50–50 with acidic organic matter such as peat, or use compost in place of some of the peat and add soil sulfur 1–2 cups per bush). If possible, prepare soil several months before planting.
- For blueberries planted in the ground, maintain soil pH 4.5–5.5 using soil sulfur which should be reapplied as needed after measuring current pH. Always water very well after fertilizing or adding sulfur.

## **Planting**

- Plant high: 1–2 inches higher than in nursery container.
- Planting time in containers: anytime. Mulch probably not needed.
- For in the soil: late fall through early spring.
- In ground, space plants 3–6 feet apart.
  - Mound soil up along sides of exposed roots.
  - Water in well; do not fertilize at planting time.
  - Mulch deeply 2–4 inches with straw, shredded leaves, compost, wood chips, or pine needles, and maintain this mulch layer throughout the life of the planting.

## **Fertilizers**

- Use acid fertilizers developed for blueberries. Follow label directions.
- Acid fertilizers for azalea, camellia, and rhododendrons can also be used if they mention blueberries. Follow label directions.

## Watering

- Blueberries require constant moisture throughout the root zone, particularly during fruit bud development and when fruit is ripening.
- Use mini-sprinklers or a coil of drip tubing to be sure the entire root zone is moist.
- Do not water so much that the soil remains constantly saturated.
- Consider a dedicated watering zone (hydrozone) for your blueberries whereby the tap water pH is reduced. Equipment that injects solutions of vinegar or citric acid will help maintain the pH of the soil below 5.5.

## Pruning

- No branch pruning in first 2–3 years, except to remove damaged branches.
- Starting in year 3 or 4, prune when dormant as follows:
  - Remove any dead, damaged, or diseased wood.
  - Remove any basal shoots thinner than a pencil or shoots crowding the center of the bush.
  - Remove older canes to keep a maximum of 6–8 canes on a fully grown bush.
  - Remove twiggy growth from high in the bush, as this will produce only small, low-quality berries.

## Pests and Diseases

- Birds, Squirrels, Gophers
  - For birds: Protect bushes with netting once the fruit has set.
- Insects
  - Black vine weevil (leaf damage)
  - Light brown apple moth (damages the berries)
  - Tussock moth (defoliates the bush)
  - Spotted wing drosophila (damages the berries)
- Diseases
  - Phytophthora root rot: fungal disease (avoid overwatering)

What to do? Contact our Help Desk [mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu/contact-us/help-desk](https://mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu/contact-us/help-desk)

## References

- Growing Blueberries in the Sacramento Region, Environmental Horticulture Notes: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/gardenweb/files/141264.pdf>
- Growing Blueberries in the Sacramento Region: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/SFA/files/294706.pdf>
- UC Davis Integrated Pest Management website: <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/>
- MGSCC website: <https://mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu/garden-help/fruits-nuts/blueberries/>
- Fall Creek Farm & Nursery offers comprehensive information about growing blueberries and new varieties for the home gardener. <https://www.fallcreeknursery.com>
- Dave Wilson Nursery offers Growing Blueberries for Home Gardens. <https://www.davewilson.com>
- Monrovia Blueberries <https://www.monrovia.com>
- Improving Competitiveness of California Blueberry Farms <https://ccsmallfarms.ucanr.edu/files/300721.pdf>

*No endorsement of the products/companies shown is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products/companies that are not included.*

*The University of California Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources (UCANR) is an equal opportunity provider.*