

# Growing berries in your back yard

*By Maggie King*

Question: I love fresh berries and would like to grow them at home, but I just have a small back yard. What can I do?

Kay Seaton  
SLO

While you're not likely to have a crop that will keep Smuckers supplied, it is possible to grow enough blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries to delight your family even in a small yard.

Blueberries are popular in home gardens because they can be grown in a very small space. In fact, in our area these berries do better in containers or raised beds, because they prefer acidic soil as opposed to our typical alkaline soil. Amending the soil in a smaller space prior to planting makes it possible to provide the needed conditions for a successful plant. Blueberries are self-pollinating, but do better if planted with another variety.

Blackberries are the most heat tolerant of the berries though some believe that their flavor is better when raised in cooler, coastal climates. They come in both erect and trailing forms and can be planted in raised beds or even large containers. They don't require pruning the first year, but thereafter should be pruned correctly and vigorously every year.

Raspberries are best adapted to cool coastal climates. They come in many colors and can be either summer or fall bearing depending on the way they are treated and pruned. Their depth of planting is very important-if the primary roots are planted more than two inches deep they may not have enough energy to push shoots up through the ground.

Strawberries are an important and successful crop in California agriculture, and most gardeners have tried growing them in home gardens with varying levels of success. A bountiful crop of home-grown strawberries requires that the gardener study the various types of cultivars and their appropriate care. They spread by forming runners and it is important to remove these runners until the plant has become well established.

All these berries have several things in common. All must be in a sunny, weed-free environment with moist-not soggy- well-drained soil .Mulching is imperative. All have shallow root systems and should not be cultivated too deeply. All are fairly easy to propagate, though it is best to purchase healthy certified plants from a nursery to avoid introducing disease to the garden. In all cases, poorly cared for and stressed plants will be more susceptible to pests.

Recommendations for pruning and feeding berries vary, as do the specific varieties appropriate for different microclimates in our county. Take advantage of the various available websites. You'll find [ucanr.org/sites/gardenweb/Berries](http://ucanr.org/sites/gardenweb/Berries) especially helpful and, as always, the Master Gardeners are happy to answer your questions.