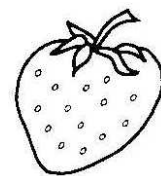


SMALL FRUITS



Tips for the Home Gardener

Growing small fruits in your garden offers a bounty of edible and aesthetic rewards. Delicious, colorful fruits and varied growth habits will enhance the summer menu as well as the year-round landscape.

Testing the Soil

Before you begin small fruit gardening, you should test your soil to determine the pH (acid level), then choose disease-resistant cultivars adapted to your climate and soil conditions. Soil test strips can be purchased at most nurseries and gardening centers, or test kits can be obtained from your local Cooperative Extension. If diseased plants have been on your property, do not plant new ones in the same location.

Deterring Birds

If you intend to harvest the fruits from your plants, you may need to consider using deterrents to protect your crops from hungry wildlife. Netting is the best bird deterrent. Plastic netting with 3/4 inch or narrower openings can be supported above the plant with wood or plastic frames, or placed directly on top of the plants. Make sure the net is attached around the lowest stems or anchored to the ground to keep birds from flying under it.

Horticultural Information for Various Small Fruits

The following list provides information for growing small fruits in temperate climates.

Blueberries

Vaccinium spp. (Family *Ericaceae*)

Blueberries are one of the few cultivated fruits native to the United States. These popular berries prefer full sun and cannot tolerate drought. Plant them in moist, well-drained, loose soil, with a pH of 4.2 to 5.5 and plenty of organic matter. Because the plants have shallow roots, mulching is essential to maintain adequate moisture. In winter, prune out older canes from the center of the bush to increase light availability and fruit quality. Plant several varieties, as cross-pollination between blueberry plants produces greater yields and larger fruits. New plants will reach full productivity the fifth year.

Elderberry

Sambucus spp. (Family *Caprifoliaceae*)

Elderberry shrubs reach four to fifteen feet tall. These plants are well adapted to Pennsylvania, are easy to grow, and have good insect and disease resistance. Prune out older branches during the winter to increase plant vitality, removing dead wood or wood older than 3 years. Attractive blossoms and berries are produced in clusters on the current season's growth.

Note: Elderberries are poisonous when eaten raw, but cooking destroys the toxins. Use the unusual tasting berries in your favorite pies, jellies and jams.

Gooseberry*Ribes grossularia* (Family *Grossulariaceae*)

Gooseberries prefer well-drained soil and full sun, though they can withstand partial shade. The fruit is produced on one-year-old wood, with the best yield on wood that is two or three years old. Remove the oldest shoots in late winter, leaving about nine shoots that are from one to three years old. This yearly pruning will increase fruit size and keep growth from becoming too thick, therefore reducing the chance of powdery mildew problems. Today's cultivated gooseberries, hybrids of the European and American varieties, have increased disease resistance. Fruits can be eaten fresh or used in jams, pies, and many other desserts.

Juneberry*Amelanchier canadensis* (Family *Rosaceae*)

Juneberries, also called serviceberries or saskatoons, grow on shrubs and small trees native to North America. White blossoms in early spring give way to small apple-shaped fruits by early summer. Juneberries should be planted in moist soil, either in sun or partial shade. Pruning is usually unnecessary.

Used similarly to blueberries, the fruit can be eaten fresh, or used in jams, sauces, or pies. Birds also love this fruit, so place netting on the shrubs in May and June to increase your harvest.

Raspberry & Blackberry*Rubus idaeas* & *Rubus fruticosus* (Family *Rosaceae*)

Raspberries and blackberries grow on thorny plants defined as fruiting brambles. Raspberries grow from erect canes, producing small, coreless fruit. Blackberries grow on trailing or erect canes, and the large fruits retain their cores when harvested. Thornless raspberry and blackberry cultivars are available to home gardeners.

All fruiting brambles prefer moderately fertile, well-drained soils. Plant raspberries and blackberries in the spring. Many varieties need some type of support to make care and harvesting easier. Since the canes of most brambles are biennial, the fruiting canes will die when fruiting is completed. Prune away dead canes in the winter. For everbearers (varieties with several seasonal yields), prune after spring or summer fruiting.

Strawberry*Fragaria* hybrids (Family *Rosaceae*)

Strawberries prefer full sun and a well-drained soil, with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Plant them in April, as soon as the ground can be worked in spring. Strawberry plants produce fruit at various times of the summer according to the cultivar selected, and keep producing well for 3-4 years. June-bearers will produce one large crop during early summer, while the everbearing types will produce throughout the summer. Strawberry "mother" plants spread by sending out runners from the base of the leaves, which grow into new "daughter" plants. After a couple of years, remove the mother plants after harvest to make room for new growth.

Grapes

Vitis vinifera & *Vitis* spp. (Family *Vitaceae*)

Grapes prefer full sun and well-drained soil rich in organic matter, with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Plant grapes in the spring with a support, such as an arbor, trellis, or cordon system. Fruit is produced on one year-old wood; within three to five growing seasons the vines will be fully productive, lasting 30 years or more. Swollen buds are tender in the spring, but fruit is cold hardy in the fall. Prune vines in February or March to increase air circulation and produce sweeter fruits.

For highest quality of flavor, allow grape clusters to hang on the vine for 4 to 6 weeks after they change color. As they mature, sugars will accumulate to produce a sweet juicy grape.

Longwood's Berry and Grape Displays

Visit Longwood's Idea Garden for a living catalog of small fruits. The Berry Display showcases cultivars that have proven productive with minimal maintenance and spraying. In the Grape Display, you can see how gardeners have utilized a cordon training system for easier maintenance and harvesting as well as to promote even ripening of fruit.

