

## Growing Blueberries in your Backyard

Tired of buying over-priced, tasteless blueberries from Florida and Mexico? The secret to growing amazing blueberries at home lies in soil preparation and species/cultivar selection.

### Preparing the Soil

Blueberries require three critical soil attributes:

- Very rapidly draining, down to 12", and away from standing water
- Very low pH, between 4.0 and 5.0
- Very low electrical conductivity (EC), which is a proxy measure of the porosity of the soil

The following recipe works even if you have hard-packed clay.

1. Remove all grass and weeds from the area in which you want to grow blueberries. A full sun location is best. Use a shovel to scalp the turf off and discard.
2. Apply and till Pine Bark
  - a. Buy and spread about 3" of pine bark mini nuggets or pine bark mulch over the entire area and till in thoroughly. Note the texture of the Agway product; this is what you are trying to find at a local bulk or bagged supplier
  - b. Repeat step 2, for a total of 6" of pine bark, well-tilled. You can till with a shovel, but takes a lot more effort. Small garden tillers can be rented for about \$50 a day; do it.
  - c. *Calculation:* For each 100 sq.ft. of blueberry patch, you will need 2 yards of bulk pine bark product, or 16 bags of 3 cu.ft. bagged product.
3. Spread around some sand, Holly-tone, and Soil Acidifier across the entire area. Ideally use sharp sand or mason's sand. Rake, but don't till yet
  - a. Play sand is not as good but will work. Target about 1" deep over the garden area.
  - b. *Calculation:* You will need about 15 or 16 bags of sand, one 27-pound bag of Holly-tone, and one 6-pound of acidifier per 100 sq.ft. of blueberry patch
4. Now buy large bales of compressed peat moss and spread evenly on top of the sand, then till deeply into the pine bark
  - a. Target about a 3-4" deep layer of peat moss
  - b. *Calculation:* You will need five of the large 3 cu.ft. bales of compressed peat moss
5. Water well and let the new bed sit for a few days. Reapply acidifier every year as a top dress. Mulch with more pine bark or pine needle straw as deep as you like.



## Choosing the Right Blueberries

Blueberries are a generic term representing over 40 species of the genus *Vaccinium*. A [full list of native \*Vaccinium\* species](#) can be found by clicking this [link](#). Huckleberries are not blueberries; they belong to the genus *Gaylussacia*, of which we have 8 native to North America. Huckleberries can also be grown in the garden bed you created above.

There are other highly edible blueberry-like producing species; our favorite blueberry alternative is [Amelanchier stolonifera](#) and has somewhat less-demanding soil requirements.

The two most commonly grown, sold, and consumed blueberries are:

- The large grocery store-style blueberry, [Vaccinium corymbosum](#), or highbush blueberry,
- The ‘wild’ blueberry, [Vaccinium angustifolium](#), or lowbush blueberry, and
- Sometimes native nurseries will also sell [Vaccinium pallidum](#), or Blue Ridge blueberry

### *Vaccinium corymbosum*

Buying and planting [straight-species or open-pollinated](#) highbush blueberry typically provides the most reliable results. High quality blueberries in low to moderate quantities with virtually no disease problems. Straight species blueberries are typically only found at native plant nurseries.

For more prolific blueberries, choose one of the many cultivars of highbush blueberry. Here are some links that can help you choose the right cultivar for your needs in both northern and southern climates.

- [Rutgers Cooperative Extension](#)
- [Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension](#)
- [Penn State Cooperative Extension](#)

For taste, we recommend Blueray, Collins, Patriot, O’Neal, and Herbert, depending on where you live.

### *Vaccinium angustifolium*

Again, straight-species plants grown by a local native plant nursery would be best. There is a cultivar called Northcountry, which produces slightly more, better-tasting fruit.

Lowbush blueberry grows natively in more northerly climates, as shown in the USDA range map, and in the Appalachians, but can survive in other climates if given some light shade during the heat of the summer.

Call ArcheWild at 855-752-6862 or write us at [contact@archewild.com](mailto:contact@archewild.com) if you need help sourcing blueberries.

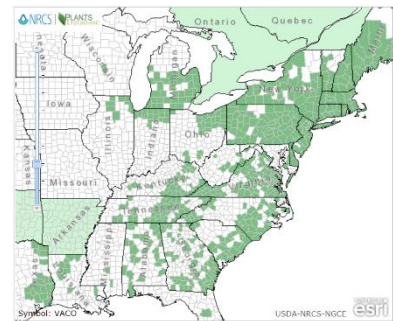


Figure 1 - Highbush blueberry range

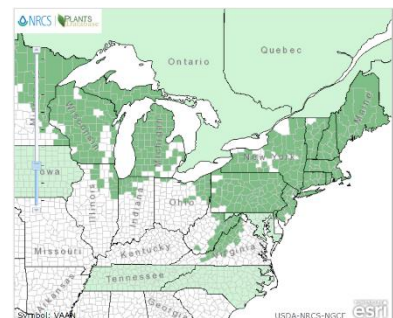


Figure 2 - Lowbush blueberry range



## Images from a Commercial Highbush Blueberry Farm in New Jersey

Note the very sandy soil in which this farm grows an unknown cultivar of highbush blueberry. Excellent drainage is important for blueberries, hence they grow them in mounded, acidic, sand/gravel beds and add moisture via irrigation pipes only when necessary.





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