

# Grow your own super food

BLUEBERRIES ARE VERY HIGH IN ANTIOXIDANTS AND VITAMINS. THE HEALTH BENEFITS ATTRIBUTED TO THESE TASTY LITTLE FRUITS COVER EVERYTHING FROM BONE STRENGTH, SKIN HEALTH, BLOOD PRESSURE, CANCER PREVENTION TO MENTAL HEALTH AND MORE.

**B**lueberries can be grown almost anywhere in New Zealand. As shrublike plants they are perfectly proportioned for smaller gardens or growing in pots. As well as their fruit, generous blueberry plants promise the bonus of attractive pinky-white bell flowers and a colourful autumn when the foliage of most varieties glows vibrant orange-red. As small to medium shrubs growing up to 1.5m tall, blueberry plants can be pruned to just 1m tall after harvest for a fantastic fruiting hedge.

## Gardener's choice

While blueberries are self fertile, planting a mix of varieties ensures cross-pollination for optimal crops and also spreads the picking season from as early as November through to March. At least two different varieties per garden is recommended, but they don't have to be side by side. Check plant labels for pollinator recommendations.

A winter chill helps to initiate flowers (and more fruit) but late spring frosts can burn flowers and prevent fruit set, so it is a good idea to choose a later maturing variety in colder regions.

**Blueberry Powder Blue** ripens from January to March with large clusters of firm light blue fruit. Suitable for all parts of New Zealand, it is a strong upright growing shrub.

**Blueberry Muffin™** is a compact little shrub around 60cm tall and wide, ideal as a container plant and equally attractive in garden soil. It produces heavy crops of medium-sized fruit in December and then fruits again in autumn before the foliage turns attractive shades of bronze.

**Blueberry Rahi** puts on a stunning autumn display of burgundy wine tones. It has a strong upright growth habit and beautiful pale blue berries, which ripen in February.

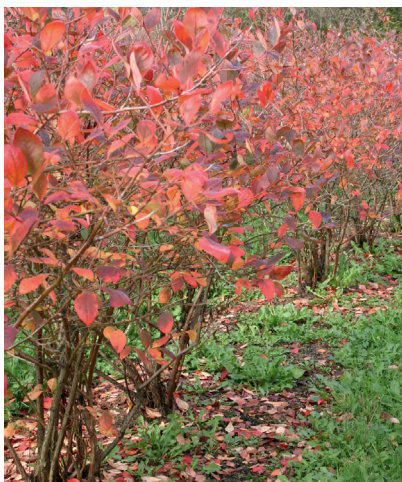




Although of excellent quality, Rahi fruit can be prone to splitting after heavy rain.

**Blueberry Maru** is suitable for all regions in New Zealand and is a good choice for gardens North of Auckland. In March this strong upright grower yields a generous volume of large dark blue fruit on attractive blue-green foliage.

Planting all four of these varieties, should give excellent yields and an extended harvest period. Other good matches to optimise pollination include **Blue Dawn™** and **Tasty Blue™**. Find out more at [edibles.co.nz](http://edibles.co.nz).



## Soil and water

Blueberries thrive in full sun but will tolerate afternoon shade. Plant in well drained soil or raised garden beds. Phytophthora root disease can be a problem on wet soils. Because blueberries love an acidic soil with a low pH of around 4.5, adding peat to the soil at planting time can be very beneficial. Mulch with something organic, such as composted sawdust or pine needles.

Plants growing in well composted garden soil need only light feeding during the first three or four springs. Fertiliser designed for acid-loving plants (like camellias) is ideal. Regularly top up with mulch to ply the soil with organic matter. Blueberries in pots need frequent light feeding. Apply controlled-release fertiliser at least twice a year while plants are actively growing. Plants in pots need regular feeding with liquid or

**Apply organic mulch to preserve moisture and boost soil health.**

controlled-release fertiliser. Water regularly to keep the potting mix moist, especially in summer.

## Pruning

Blueberries fruit on the ends of branches that formed the previous summer and the most vigorous of these bear the biggest fruit. So it's important not to remove too much of this with pruning. Prune to remove any dead or diseased wood and weak or old twiggy branches. After 4-5 years, prune the oldest branches back to the crown to encourage vigorous new growth. Pruning to shape may be done at any time, but any heavy pruning is best done in winter while the plants are dormant.

## Before harvest

Use nets to protect blueberry crops from birds. Leaving fruit on the plant for a week after they turn blue ensures best flavour. 🌿

**Plant a mix of blueberry varieties for a productive hedge.**