Fruit For All!

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Many Portlanders have fully embraced vegetable gardening, but may have

overlooked some of the small fruits-shrubs and perennials that can make a

great addition to any edible garden. Unlike most veggie crops, most small

fruits will continue to produce for years to come, making them a great

investment for the landscape. Local garden centers have the best selection

of small fruits in late winter and early spring, so now is the best time to

pick a fruit plant of your own.

Our Portland climate allows us to grow a large variety of small fruits

such as brambles (think raspberries, blackberries, currants, and

gooseberries), exotic fruits such as honeyberries and kiwis, natives such as

elderberries and huckleberries, and standards like grapes and blueberries.

We will focus on blueberries which make the perfect addition to any garden, because they are easy to grow, and especially fun for households with children. They come in many different sizes, and can be grown in pots allowing them to fit into even the smallest of gardens.

Most blueberries are highbush varieties that eventually grow 4’-7’ tall and wide. Some popular varieties include ‘Bluecrop’, ‘Jersey’, and ‘Patriot’. Lowbush and half-high types like ‘Brunswick’ typically grow about a foot tall and spread out several feet. Southern highbush types like ‘Sunshine Blue’ often stay under 4’ tall, and are evergreen. The smaller types grow well in pots.

Blueberries prefer full sun—at least 6-8 hours per day in the spring and summer. They do best in well-drained soil amended with lots of compost. They also need an acidic soil (pH of 4.5 to 5.5). Soil in Portland is generally slightly acidic already, but fertilizing with an organic acid plant food (such as for azaleas) will help maintain the right pH. For blueberries in pots, use a planting mix formulated for acid-loving plants.

When summer comes, blueberries will need lots of water. Mulch around the base of the plant with wood chips or compost to help retain moisture around the roots.

To ensure cross-pollination it is best to plant at least two different blueberry varieties. Different varieties produce fruit at different times throughout the summer. Most gardeners plan for bloom times to overlap, (for pollinating purposes) but not be identical. This allows them to eat fewer blueberries for longer, as opposed to getting an abundance of blueberries all at once.

Blueberries are not only easy to grow, but decorative as well. The flowers are dainty and bell-shaped with unique pink and blue coloring. In the fall after you’ve enjoyed all those tasty berries, the leaves turn beautiful shades of red, yellow and orange, giving you vibrant fall color. Their stems add color and form to barren winter gardens. Blueberries have much more to offer than tasty berries, making them the perfect plant for year-round interest.

Visit your local garden center for more information on selecting and growing blueberries.