**Blueberries** are semi-evergreen shrubs that can grow to 15 foot tall with beautiful white flowers in the spring. We only sell **Rabbiteye (Vaccinium ashei)** and **Southern Highbush** **(Vaccinium darrowii)** varieties because they will produce well in our area. Blueberries rarely have disease or insect problems and only need minimal pruning. Blueberries will produce fruit the very first season they are in the ground…but for the plant’s sake, remove most of the harvest for the first year or two, just keep a few for yourself. The 3rd year and every year after that, you will have a bountiful harvest of up to 40 pounds of fruit. Next time you are in the grocery store…do the math. You can expect to harvest berries from the end of May to the end of July. Some cultivars are early and some are late, so plant an assortment to extend the season.

Blueberries need soils that are **well drained, rich in organic matter, and acidic**. Without a well-prepared bed, your blueberries will not thrive. Prepare the planting area by adding a minimum of 6 inches of Landscapers Pride Soil Conditioner (pH 4.1) or compost that has been “cooking” for at least a year (less than a year and compost can sprout all kinds of weeds). Mix well. Add granular sulfur (if you are not using Soil Conditioner) to create an acidic condition, just follow the products directions. Apply an organic fertilizer and additional sulfur (if needed) when the blooming begins, in mid-May and then after the fruit harvest. Be careful not to over fertilize, with use of an organic program the possibilities of this happening are remote.

 Plant blueberries as you would an azalea by loosening the root ball and spreading them out. Add mulch around the plants, but not up to the trunk. Just like azaleas, too much mulch on blueberries is a death sentence. After planting, water thoroughly. Planting them in a whiskey barrel or a very large pot has proven very successful. Not all blueberries are self-pollinating, so plant at least two cultivars. Some will produce berries, when planted alone. However, adding a “friend” will greatly increase your production. Plant them 5 or 6 feet apart, and alternate the varieties. Blueberries can get very large, and you will want to be able to get between and around them to pick all the berries. Watering blueberries regularly is important. Extended dry periods are as great a threat as poor drainage.

 Prune blueberries after you have harvested all the fruit. Removal of old wood, after the first 4 to 6 years, will promote new growth and leads to heavier production…but your bushes will still bear without this pruning. Thinning the bushes aids in light penetration and makes it easier to collect all the fruit. Keeping your bushes less than 7 feet tall will make harvesting convenient and safe, getting on a ladder in the garden is just not advisable. A ladder on soft or unleveled ground is just not smart.

Blueberry season runs from May to July. Actual ripening depends on chill hours, location, and variety. Ripening can vary a little from year to year.

The greatest dangers to your harvest are birds. Once they find your crop, birds will camp out and eat them as quickly as they ripen. Use bird netting to ensure that you get your share.

**Rabbiteye varieties** (plant several varieties together)

**BECKY BLUE** Early ripening variety with sweet, medium to large, light blue berries. A tall spreading bush.

**BRIGHTWELL** An early to mid-season variety with medium-large, juicy, light blueberries with a sweet flavor. An upright, vigorous grower and a consistent producer that does best planted with Premier. Produces in between Climax and Tifblue.

**CLIMAX** The earliest ripening, medium sized, dark blueberries with a sweet flavor, make this one of the best for Houston. An upright plant with intense green foliage that does best planted with Premier. A great variety whether you freeze, bake or can them…they all ripen in a very short time.

**PREMIER** Early to mid-season variety with large, light blue, quality fruit and an excellent flavor on a highly productive, upright bush. Grows 6 to 10 foot tall and can make an interesting hedge.

**TIFBLUE** Accepted as the benchmark for all rabbiteyes. Mid to late season, large, light blue fruit with good quality and the berries that hold up well on the plant. Has great fall color on an upright plant. Tifblue is the number one selection of blueberry in the country.

**WOODARD** Early to mid-season variety with quality fruit when fully ripe. Do not pick this one too early. When young this variety will fruit more heavily than others will. Medium height, good for a smaller yard.

**Southern Highbush varieties** (plant several varieties together)

**BOUNTIFUL BLUE** This prolific variety produces large fruit that are super sweet. The foliage is the bluest of all varieties and only grows to 3 or 4 feet tall and wide, making it an excellent choice for a potted plant.

**JEWEL** A **s**lightly tart flavor in a very large berry. This bush grows in an upright form, making it good for tight areas. Ripens early to mid-season, May to mid-June.

**MISTY** Large sized fruit on a vigorous plant. Does exceptionally well through our summers. Mid-season. Ripens in June. Grows to 6 foot tall and wide.

**SUNSHINE BLUE** Hot pink flowers grow into large, tangy fruit on a compact bush…perfect to grow in a large pot or as a hedge. A firm berry with a great flavor. Very cold hardy and self-fruitful, but is even better with a “friend”. Early to mid-season, ripens May to June.