

Growing Small Fruits

Blueberries

Blueberries grow best in Iowa in a sunny spot with well drained soil. The soil must also be acidic and have a pH of 4 or 5. To increase the acidity of your soil add Aluminum Sulphate or Spagnum peat. When you plant your blueberry bushes, plant 2 to 3 varieties to get the best pollination and production of fruit. Dig a hole, put the plant in, and backfill the hole with a 50/50 mixture of soil and spagnum peat. Apply mulch to the base of the plant to help retain moisture, then prune the shrub back by half to encourage growth. The two types of blueberries that grow well in Iowa are high bush blueberries and half high blueberries. High bush blueberries grow to be 6-8' tall and are hardy only in central and sothern Iowa. After five years they reach maturity and will produce 5 to 10 lbs of berries per plant. Half high blueberry bushes grow 1' to 2' tall and have a greater tolerance for cold temperatures. They will produce 1 to 3 pounds of berries per plant.

Blackberries & Raspberries

There are many delicious blackberry and raspberry varieties to choose from now--some are everbearing (bearing fruit all summe long) and even thornless varieties available. When you bring your blackberry & raspberry shrubs home from the garden center, cut the canes to the ground, leaving just a few leaves at the base of the plant. Plant in a sunny location with well drained soil. When your plants start to produce fruit you can pick the berries and eat them straight from the plant. If you live in area where the birds are eating your berries you can cover it with a net to protect them unitl you are ready to pick. As soon as your canes are done bearing fruit they can be trimmed to the ground to make room for new canes that are still sprouting. Plan to thin out your berry patch by 1/3 each year. This helps keep your berry thicket manageable and thriving with big juicy berries.

Rhubarb

Rhubarb plants can be purchased from our garden center or if you are lucky enough you may receive a division from a friend. Rhubarb should be divided in the spring just as the plant is beginning to sprout. Rhubarb should be planted in a sunny spot with well drained soil. The rhubarb will have to get established before it can be harvested, typically two to three years. Rhubarb should be harvested in early summer. Do not harvest more than 2/3 of the plant and do not harvest after the end of June. This helps to keep the plant healthy and strong.

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Grapes

Plant your grapes vines in the early spring for best results in Iowa. When choosing your grape vines consider winter hardiness, time of ripening, and intended use of the grapes. We can recommend a variety specifically for your needs. Choose a sunny area with well drained soil, grape vines do not like to be overly moist for extended periods of time. Grape vines will tolerate a wide variety of soil types but prefer soil with a slightly acidic pH of 6 to 6.5. Before you plant your vines soak their roots in water for 2 to 3 hours. Plant the vines approximately 6' to 8' apart. Space the rows at least 9' apart. Once the grapevine is planted, cut the strongest cane back to two or three strong buds; completely remove all other canes. If a trellis is not used during the first growing season, set a 5- to 6-foot stake into the soil near each grapevine and train the new growth to it. Water each plant thoroughly after planting and every 7 to 10 days during dry weather.

Strawberries

There are several varieties of strawberries. June bearing will bear strawberries in June. Everbearing will bear strawberries in June and again in August. Neutral day strawberries will bear continual strawberries all summer long. Once you have picked your variety, take your strawberry plants home and plant in a sunny spot or bright partial shade. They prefer moist rich soil. For the first six weeks, pinch off all the flowers so the strawberry plants grow strong and healthy before bearing fruit. Once the plants are flowering, fertilize them once a month to help create juicy berries. You may need to place netting or use repellents to keep birds and squirrels away from ripe fruit. If you notice your crop of strawberries is diminishing after several years you may need to add some new plants to your garden.

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