



## Small Fruits

For Large Gardens or Small!

### Location & Preparation

Small, or soft fruits, are general terms for a diverse group of plants bearing soft-skinned, juicy fruits that grow on bushes, perennial plants or vines. As a rule, they require very little space, normally produce crops within a year or two of planting and are easy to prune and harvest. Soft fruits are usually divided into five categories:

- Herbaceous perennials, such as strawberries
- Cane fruits, such as raspberries, blackberries and tayberries
- Bush fruits, such as currants, blueberries and gooseberries
- Vines, such as grapes and kiwi
- Broadleaf evergreen shrubs, such as lingonberry and cranberry

Some small fruits are also great as 'ornamentals'. Compact-growing blueberries have stunning fall and winter colour and blend nicely with other plants in the landscape. Taller varieties can work very well as hedges. Cranberries make great groundcovers in a variety of conditions. Grape vines can create shade and privacy screens if trained correctly. Everbearing strawberries look fabulous trailing over cement walls and produce a continuous supply of delicious fruit.

trellises and/or wiring will achieve this. For your first year, just let the vine get in and get growing. Refer to our Pruning 102 handout for details on pruning from year two on.

**Haskaps:** A member of the honeysuckle family, native to Russia and Japan, bearing very tasty, seedless, blueberry-like fruit in large quantities. Exceptionally hardy (Zone 3) and early ripening (June). Plant two for production - check the pollinator list for best matches. Prefer rich, well-drained soil. Generally grow 3-4' HxW.

**Jostaberry:** A cross between gooseberries and blackcurrants, they are large, crimson-black, sweet-tart berries high in vitamin C. Thornless and disease resistant. Self pollinating. Ripen in July. Grows to 3-6' HxW.

**Loganberry:** A cross between a blackberry and a raspberry, loganberries are long, large, dark red fruits with great tart flavour. Thornless vines. Self pollinating. Ripen in July. Cane fruit; support horizontally. Plant 24" apart.

**Raspberry:** Try planting them in clumps 24" apart, supported by two sets of wires at knee and chest height. Raspberries need good air circulation. All are self-pollinating. Everbearing plants produce from mid-summer through to fall. Varieties include: Autumn Bliss, Caroline, Fall Gold, Heritage, Nova and Prelude. Main Season plants produce in summer (some are earlier, some are later). Varieties include: Boyne, Encore, Lauren, Tulameen and Willamette. The new 'Brazleberry®' series of compact raspberries (and blueberries) are great candidates for containers. Remember to feed container berries with slow release fertilizer.

**Rhubarb** Will tolerate full sun to part shade. Select your location carefully - they will produce for up 18 years but they do not like to be moved! Soil should be well-drained but moist and rich in organic matter (compost or well-rotted manure), and top dress with compost or manure each year. Once they're established you can feed with 14-14-14 to give them a boost too. Do not harvest stalks the first year you plant - just let the plant grow. When harvesting in year two, grasp stalk near the base and pull sideways and out-

ward. *Do not put leaves in your compost pile.* Most rhubarb grows to 3' HxW, so do give them a bit of room. Very hardy. Can be divided after 5 years.

**Saskatoon Berry:** Fast growing shrub to 8'+H (don't worry, you can prune to size!). Indigo berries mature in July/August and are small, sweet, high in antioxidants and taste similar to blueberries. Foliage turns brilliant orange-red in fall. Exceptionally hardy to Zone 2. Self-pollinating.

**Seaberry:** Also known as 'Sea Buckthorn'. Prized for its nutritious fruit (high in antioxidants, vitamins A, E, C), attractive habit and because its root system helps to fix nitrogen in the soil. Male and female varieties are needed to produce fruit. Refer to plant tags for identification. Seaberries thrive in dry, sandy locations. Hardy to zone 3. Grows to 6-10' HxW (can be pruned to size!).

**Strawberry:** Everbearing types produce smaller berries from June to early fall (day neutrals produce all season long if it's cool enough, everbearers once in June, and then another crop summer to fall). Good choices are of everbearers/day neutrals are: Albion, Eversweet, Quinalt and Seascape. June Bearing types produce larger berries once, right around, you guessed it, June. Good choices are: All Star, Annapolis, Cavendish, Honeoye, Kent and Totem. Strawberries are happiest in well-drained, sandy (loamy) soil and full sun. They are perennial but with a lifespan of approx. 6 years.

**Tayberry:** A cross between a raspberry and blackberry, tayberries are purple-red, aromatic and have a strong, tart flavour. Productive. Self pollinating. Ripen in late July/August. Cane fruit; supports are recommended.



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## Planting

Small fruits perform best in deep, well-drained soil containing a fair bit of organic matter. Choose an open, sunny area with good air flow. Blueberries, currants, rhubarb and gooseberries will tolerate partial shade.

Late winter or early spring are the best times to purchase plants. Plant bare root plants in prepared beds or containers by digging a hole slightly deeper and wider than the root ball. Gently fill in around the plant with good, well-drained soil and give it a good watering. Fertilize as soon as the plants become established.

## Raised Beds

Raised beds are very popular for growing small fruits and with good reason. In wet conditions, raised beds provide better drainage. They also create warmer soil, which gives plants a boost early in the season.

Landscape ties are popular for creating raised beds, but make sure you know what you're using. Wood sold as landscape ties in garden centres or lumber yards is often just dimension lumber which has been treated with a preservative. To be safe you can line the inside of your beds with plastic to be sure nothing leaches from the ties. Another option is to use bricks or interlocking blocks rather than wooden ties. As the soil expands in volume from the annual addition of organic material, you can add another layer of interlocking blocks to raise the beds. Bricks or blocks allow you to create an attractively shaped garden that blends in with your landscape, and the bonus is you don't have to worry about leaching.

Small fruits can be grown in containers, but a half wine barrel size is the smallest to be used.

## Care & Feeding

Soft fruits require attention to keep the plants looking good and producing optimum fruit yields. Yearly pruning, fertilizing and some disease and pest control are necessary to keep them in top form.

Water well, especially during the hot summer months, but take care not to overwater or leave plants in standing water. None of them like wet feet, especially blueberries and raspberries.

An annual mulching of well-rotted manures will encourage plenty of growth, but make sure to counter that with some high-phosphorus and high-potash fertilizer to control rapid growth and produce large crops of good-sized fruits. In areas of heavy rainfall and heavy soils, an annual application of dolomite lime is an excellent idea.

Please refer to our 'Pruning 102' handout for pruning guidelines for main small fruit families.

## Variety Characteristics

**Unless otherwise noted, the small fruits listed here are hardy to (at least) Zone 5 and 6.**

**Blueberries:** Are great ornamentals with flowers, fruit and brilliant fall foliage. They are self-fertile but produce far more with two or more different varieties planted near each other. Try early, mid-season and late varieties to extend your harvest period. Blueberries prefer slightly acidic soil (great for our area!). Bushes fall into three categories: Lowbush: 1-2 feet high, Half High-bush: 3-4 feet high, Highbush: 4-6 feet high.

**Cranberries** Lowbush varieties are of the vaccinium family, low growing to 10"H (2"W), evergreen and produce tasty dark red, tart berries. These are 'traditional' cranberries. High-bush varieties are members of the viburnum family and grow 8' high and produce clusters of red berries (used for wines, syrups and preserves). Both are self-fertile and very hardy (Zone 3).

**Currants:** Most fruit is produced on last year's stems, so new growth must be allowed to develop each year. Do your pruning in the dormant season. With black currants, once established, cut out some old stems leaving a good number of last year's stems to produce a new crop. Red and white currants are pruned to leave an open center (to improve air circulation). Currants are self-pollinating. Most fruit reaches maturity in July. Generally they grow 3-4' HxW.

**Elderberries:** Fast-growing shrubs producing clusters of red berries that turn black in July and August. Elderberries are rich in antioxidants and vitamins A and C. Plants prefer full to part sun and moist, well-drained soil. For effective pollination it is advised to plant two different varieties of elderberry. Generally they grow 6-8' HxW.

**Figs:** Need a south or west facing location where they will get as much sun and heat as possible. Figs require winter protection in our area (most sold are Zone 7 though 'Chicago' is hardy to Zone 5) and very well-drained soil. Protect in winter by wrapping with N'Sulate fabric and mulching the roots. Self-fertile. 8-10' HxW.

**Goji Berry:** Bears light purple, bell-shaped flowers in late spring followed by sweet-tart red berries summer to fall. Self-fertile. Berries are among the highest in antioxidants, have more carotene than carrots, all essential amino acids and many minerals. It's a 'superberry'! Generally they grow 6-8'H x 4-6'W.

**Gooseberries:** Prefer partial shade and tend to do best if pruned to an open center form, like red and white currants. When gooseberries are mature, keep removing old canes allowing the growth of new, more productive canes. Gooseberries are self-fertile and generally grow 3-4' HxW.

**Grapes:** Take about three years to begin producing from a two-year old plant (available here). All grapes are self-fertile. Grapes need: as much sun as possible (South and West facing locations are ideal), well-drained, porous, slightly alkaline (so no lime around them) soil, and vines to be kept off the ground to ensure they have excellent air circulation (a proper pruning regime and use of