

Small Fruits & Berries

Quick Growing Tips

ASPARAGUS: Asparagus like an alkaline soil, so make sure to work lime into the planting area. Work in organic matter, preferably, 1 to 2 months ahead of planting. When planting, mound up soil and spread plant's roots out. Plant in a trench so the crowns are about 5" below soil level. Cover with 1" to 2" of mulch. Every 2 to 3 years top-dress with more mulch. The first year DO NOT harvest, it makes for a stronger plant next year. Harvest no longer than 6 weeks. If you harvest all spears the crown will die, so make sure to leave some! Watch for slugs & asparagus beetles.

BLACKBERRIES: Plant January through April. Blackberries thrive in most soils, but need good drainage. Make sure soil is loose, fertile & workable. Plant at same depth they were in the nursery pot making sure to cover any white sprouts rising from the crown. When blooming, apply organic fertilizer. As new canes begin growing on the ground, move them in alongside the row occasionally to keep them out of harm's way until ready to be trained. Canes will usually take at least 2 years before bearing any fruit. After harvest, remove 2 year canes as close to coil as possible. Easiest way to train is to stake with a cross arm about 5 feet high. Bring canes up from ground or spiral around stake and hold in place in 2 or 3 spots.

BLUEBERRIES: Blueberries like an acidic, well-draining soil in a sunny/part-shady area. They like mulch high in organic matter. In spring, fertilize with an organic fertilizer. Depending on variety, give 6 feet between plants and do not plant deep. If plants are 2 to 3 years old you can remove some blossoms to promote health growth. They tend to overbear, thinning sometimes helps to promote larger fruit and overall healthier plant. You may need to protect fruit from birds with netting. They need consistent moisture when setting fruit. Make sure to check out the new dwarf varieties as well as those that stay evergreen in mild winters..

CURRENT: Currants bear at the base of year-old wood and on spurs of 2 & 3 year old canes. Prune to keep a balance of canes, trying to remove older & weaker ones each year. Full sun is best with good drainage. When plants are 'setting' fruit, make sure they have ample water.

GOOSEBERRY: Full sun is best for gooseberries with good drainage. When they are 'setting' fruit, make sure they have ample water. Prune out old and weaker canes to keep a real strong balanced plant.

GRAPES: Plant in late winter or early spring. Grapes prefer a rich, light soil with good drainage. Soil should be kept moist the 1st year after planting, but in following years they will handle some dry spells. Apply an organic fertilizer in the spring. Prune back top growth to 2 or 3 buds anytime December through February before bud break, if you can. On new plants, prune roots to avoid 'wadding' in the planting hole. Plant them 1" deeper than they were in the nursery pot & space 8 feet apart for best performance. The first season will produce 1 main trunk from buds left at planting time. Pick strongest vine for this purpose. In our area, plant in full sun.

KIWI: Kiwis are a delicious vine that like full sun/part shade. They are very vigorous. You will need a sturdy structure for support. Give them rich soil with moderate water. Winter is the best time to prune for shape and fruit set. You may prune lightly in summer to maintain control. Pick fruit before the first frost & let ripen indoors. It can take several years, in our climate, to bear fruit! Remember to plant a male AND female start for Fuzzy Kiwis (for cross-pollenization) OR choose a self-fertile hard-skinned variety.

RASPBERRIES: Raspberries prefer a deep, well-draining, fertile soil in a sunny spot. Work organic material into soil in early spring and after harvesting. Best planted in late winter/early spring, space 2 to 3 feet apart in row with 8 to 10 feet between rows, if possible. Plant canes 1" deeper than they were in the nursery pot. Spring crop varieties fruit on 2 year wood. After harvest, remove 2 year canes. Thin 1 year canes the following year to remove weak or dying canes. You should be left with 7 to 10 canes. Everbearing varieties are much the same, except they also fruit in fall as well as on 1 year old wood. Remove top part of cane that fall and leave the rest for spring. When canes are 2 years old, remove as much as possible. Support with stakes or trellises.

RHUBARB: Rhubarb crowns need to be planted shallow. At least 1/4 to 1/3 of the crown must be above ground. Make sure bud is above soil line. They like sunny/part shady areas with GOOD drainage. Work compost into area before planting & water and fertilize regularly for best performance.

STRAWBERRIES: Strawberries like a sunny, well-draining spot. Work up soil a month before planting with compost. Make a small mound in the soil, planting the strawberry on top with crown at soil level, spreading roots out. Water in well. Side dress in March or April with an organic fertilizer. Mulch to keep weeds down and fruit from laying in the soil. Watch for slugs! When fruit is red all over, begin harvesting. Cut back when done. Make a new plant by pushing a 'runner' into the soil, covering it. Leave for 4 to 6 weeks. Cut 'runner' and you will have another plant. Replace the original 'mother' plant every 3 to 4 years to keep maximum production.