

Selecting berry crop varieties for Central Oregon

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Credit: Steve Dodrill

Several kinds of berry crops can be grown successfully in Central Oregon. The key is to select varieties suited to local growing conditions and follow recommendations for planting and care. A typical growing season in Central Oregon ranges from 70 to 100 days, depending on location. Frost can occur at any time of the year in this region, including when berry plants are flowering or setting fruit—with possible damage to potential crops. Although a plant may grow well, fruit production may still vary from year to year. At lower elevations, the milder climate generally increases the chance of producing a successful fruit crop.

Berry crop varieties

Many berry crops are successful in Central Oregon, especially raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, currants, and serviceberries. You also might try cold-hardy, early-season varieties of table grapes, blueberries, and blackberries.

Tips for growing berry crops

The following suggestions can help increase your chances of fruit production.

- Select cold-hardy, short-season varieties.
- Select a site with full sun and well drained soil.
- Select a high spot with good air flow to reduce the risk of frost damage.
- Remove all weeds from the site before planting.
- If necessary, protect plants from the elements in mid- to late-spring and early summer by covering them with row cover (frost cloth).

Strawberries (*Fragaria species*)

Choose a site with about 8 hours of sun each day. Most commercial strawberry producers in Oregon grow June-bearing varieties for their high quality and productivity. In addition to these, home gardeners often choose day-neutral or “everbearing” types. These varieties produce fruit throughout the summer, although yield and fruit quality may be lower than with the June-bearing types. Varieties that perform well in the Willamette Valley might not perform well in Central Oregon, because they often lack sufficient cold-hardiness. Covering plants with straw mulch may offer some winter protection and prevent bud break from occurring too early in spring.

Strawberries are self-fertile. (Only one variety is needed for fruit production.)

Recommended varieties

- **June bearing (1 crop):** Allistair, Clancy, Earliglow, Jewel, Honeoye, Lateglow
- **Everbearing (2 crops, less yield):** Fort Laramie, Quinault
- **Day-neutral (Continual crop):** Fern, Hecker, Selva, Tribute, Tristar

Raspberries and blackberries (*Rubus species*)

Most raspberry and blackberry plants reach maturity and produce fruit 2 years after planting. They generally produce for 8 to 10 years.

In Central Oregon, raspberry plants perform well, and blackberry plants are marginally successful. Primocane-fruiting raspberries, which bear a crop of new canes in late summer to fall, work well in cold-climate areas. Generally, if these canes are left to overwinter, they will bear another crop in early summer the next year. However, in cold areas, it's best to cut the canes to the ground in late winter.

Although this prevents production of the early-summer crop the following year, new canes will emerge the following spring and produce a crop in late summer or fall.

Raspberries and blackberries are self-fertile.

Recommended varieties

- **Summer-bearing, red raspberries:** Algonquin, Boyne, Canby, Encore, Haida, Killarney, Latham, Nova, Skeena, Titan
- **Primocane-fruiting (bears on new canes in late summer) raspberries:**
 - Red - Amity, Autumn Bliss, Caroline, Heritage, Summit
 - Yellow - Anne, Fallgold
- **Black raspberries** - Bristol, Cumberland, Jewel
- **Purple raspberries** - Brandywine, Royalty
- **Blackberries** - Chester (thornless), Illini Hardy (thorny), Triple Crown (thornless)

Gooseberries and currants (*Ribes species*)

Unlike most fruit crops, gooseberries and currants will produce fruit in partial or light shade. Choose a variety that is resistant to powdery mildew. In the case of black currants, also look for resistance to white-pine blister rust. Most gooseberry and currant plants are self-fertile, unless specifically mentioned otherwise in catalog descriptions.

Recommended varieties

- **Gooseberries**

- **Red:** Captivator, Hinomaki Red, Pixwell, Poorman, Welcome
- **White/Yellow:** Malling invicta, Hinomaki Yellow, Oregon Champion

- **Currants**

- **Black:** Ben Sarek, Titania
- **Red:** Cherry Red, Jonkeer Van Tets, Perfection, Red Lake, Rovada, Wilder
- **White:** Primus, White Imperial

Saskatoons (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)

Saskatoons (also known as serviceberries, Juneberries, or mountain blueberries) produce a berry that can be eaten fresh or used to make jelly, jam, syrup, and wine. Like blueberries, this fruit is rich in antioxidants. It is sometimes called “Canada’s blueberry” because of extensive cultivation there. Saskatoon is also grown ornamentally for its attractive white flower and orange-to-red fall color.

When grown for fruit, these plants prefer full sun and moist, well-drained soil. Harvest saskatoons when the fruit changes from pink to dark purple. Many birds love this fruit, so consider covering your plants with netting to prevent birds from eating all of your crop.

Plants are self-fertile and bear fruit after 2 to 4 years (depending on their age when planted). Full production occurs after 7 to 11 years. Fruit are borne on the previous year’s growth. The varieties listed below have large, high-quality fruit.

Recommended varieties

- Honeywood, Northline, Pembina, Smokey, Thiessen

Blueberries (*Vaccinium species*)

Blueberry plants require well-drained, acid soil (pH from 4.2 to 5.5) with relatively high organic matter. Soils in Central Oregon are not naturally acidic; our soils tend to be neutral to alkaline (pH of 7.0 or higher).

You may want to have your soil tested for pH. If the pH is above 5.5, reduce it by adding elemental sulfur 1 to 2 years before planting. Check the soil pH of your planting area or container every 1 or 2 years, as use of alkaline irrigation water will cause pH to rise.

Before planting, till in an 8- to 10-inch-deep layer of compost. Keep the planting area evenly moist, as blueberry plants do not perform well in droughtlike or overly wet environments.

Given our native soil conditions, it may be best to grow blueberries in containers, where management of soil pH may be simpler. Compact blueberry types, called “half-high,” are very well-suited to container production. In very cold-winter areas, protect roots against extreme temperatures by bringing containers into a protected area or sinking them into the ground through winter. Blueberry plants require cross-pollination by a different variety to set big berries, so plant more than one variety.

Recommended varieties

- **Highbush cultivars:** Bluecrop, Blueray, Jersey, Patriot
- **Half-high cultivars:** Northblue, Northcountry, Northland, Northsky

Table grapes (*Vitus* species)

American table grapes and their hybrids are best suited for cold climates; European grape varieties are less cold-hardy. Grapes prefer full sun and are relatively drought tolerant, although irrigation is required in most parts of Central Oregon.

Recommended varieties

- **Blue/Black:** Fredonia, Valient, Venus (seedless)
- **Red:** Canadice (seedless), Reliance (seedless), Vanessa (seedless)
- **White/Yellow:** Himrod (seedless), Lakemont (seedless), Niagara

For more information

OSU Extension publications

- [Growing Strawberries in Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1307\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1307), EC 1307
- [Growing Raspberries in Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1306\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1306), EC 1306
- [Red Raspberry Cultivars for Oregon \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1310\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1310), EC 1310
- [Growing Currants and Gooseberries in Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1361\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1361), EC 1361
- [Growing Blueberries in Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1304\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1304), EC 1304
- [Blueberry Cultivars for Oregon \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1308\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1308), EC 1308
- [Growing Blackberries in Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1303\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1303), EC 1303
- [Growing Grapes in Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1305\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1305), EC 1305
- [Grape Cultivars for Your Home Garden \(https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1309\)](https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1309), EC 1309

University of Idaho publications

- [Growing Strawberries in the Inland Northwest and Intermountain West \(https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/bul/bul0810.pdf\)](https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/bul/bul0810.pdf), BUL 810
- [Growing Raspberries and Blackberries in the Inland Northwest and Intermountain West \(https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/bul/bul0812.pdf\)](https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/bul/bul0812.pdf), BUL 812
- [Growing Blueberries in the Inland Northwest and Intermountain West \(https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/bul/bul0815.pdf\)](https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/bul/bul0815.pdf), BUL 815

Other resources

- [Central Oregon Climate and How it Relates to Gardening \(https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/gardening-central-oregons-climate\)](https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/gardening-central-oregons-climate) Provides climate information, including precipitation, elevation, growing season, hardiness, zones, and other factors.
- [Small Farm Resources \(https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/resources/crops\)](https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/resources/crops)
- [Good Fruit Grower magazine \(http://www.goodfruit.com/about.php\)](http://www.goodfruit.com/about.php).

Fruit suppliers

Trade-name products and services are mentioned as illustrations only. This does not mean that the Oregon State University Extension Service either endorses these products and services or intends to discriminate against products and services not mentioned.

- [Indiana Berry & Plant Company](http://www.indianaberry.com/index.html) (<http://www.indianaberry.com/index.html>), Huntingburg, IN
- [Nourse Farms](http://www.noursefarms.com/) (<http://www.noursefarms.com/>), Deerfield, MA
- [One Green World](http://www.onegreenworld.com/) (<http://www.onegreenworld.com/>), Mollala, OR
- [Raintree Nursery](https://raintree nursery.com/) (<https://raintree nursery.com/>), Morton, WA
- [Weeks Berry Farm](http://www.weeksberry.com/) (<http://www.weeksberry.com/>) (wholesale only), Keizer, OR

Nursery directories

- [Central Oregon's Plant Resource Guide](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/Horticulture/documents/COPlantResourceLstV1.pdf). (<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/Horticulture/documents/COPlantResourceLstV1.pdf>) Provides lists of local nurseries that sell plant materials.
- [Oregon Association of Nurseries Directory and Buyers Guide](http://www.nurseryguide.com/). (<http://www.nurseryguide.com/>) Lists wholesale and retail outlets, and garden centers.

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