

HIGHBUSH BLUEBERRY

Vaccinium corymbosum L.

Plant Symbol = VACO

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center & the Biota of North America Program



Botany Dept., NMNH, Smithsonian Institution
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Alternate Names

Northern highbush blueberry, southeastern highbush blueberry, Maryland highbush blueberry, black highbush blueberry, American blueberry, New Jersey blueberry, rabbiteye blueberry, swamp blueberry, tall huckleberry, mayberry, whortleberry

Uses

Fruit production: *V. corymbosum*, highbush blueberry, a native North American shrub cultivated throughout the country, is the major blueberry-producing species in commerce. More than 50 cultivars have been developed, primarily for commercially valuable fruit characteristics and seasonality.

Landscaping: A few selections are used in landscaping, especially as plantings in wet areas or to attract wildlife.

Food: Highbush blueberries are eaten raw, smoke-dried, sun-dried, boiled, and baked in a wide variety of culinary settings. They have one of the highest concentrations of iron of the temperate fruits.

Wildlife: Blueberries provide important summer and early fall food for numerous species of game birds, songbirds, and mammals.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Highbush blueberry is a native, upright, 6-12 feet tall, crown-forming shrub. The common name refers to the relatively tall stature of these plants. Twigs are yellow-green (reddish in winter) and covered with small wart-like dots. Leaves are deciduous, alternate, simple, elliptic or ovate, 1 to 3½ inches long and slightly waxy above with pubescence (hairs) at least on the veins beneath. The white or pink-tinged flowers are small and urn-shaped with 5 petals, and occur 8 to 10 per cluster. Flowering occurs February to June, sporadically in the southern portion of its range; fruiting occurs April to October, about 62 days after flowering. Fruits are ¼ - ½" blue-black berries with many seeds.

In the PLANTS database, plants known as "highbush" blueberries are actually a group of interrelated species. Hybrids are often used in commercial fruit production.

Adaptation and Distribution

Widespread in eastern North America, the highbush blueberry has been introduced outside of its natural range for commercial berry production. The most common native habitat is in moist or wet peat of moderate to high acidity – in and around marshes, swamps, lakes and flood-prone areas. *V. corymbosum* also occurs in drier areas such as dunes and barrier beaches, rocky hillsides, oak woods, and pinewoods.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Highbush blueberry produces abundant fruit every year. Highbush blueberry (*V. corymbosum*) is self-fertile, but cross-pollination increases fruit set and results in larger, earlier berries with more seeds (Agriculture Western Australia 2000). Other species

of the complex are partially or completely self-incompatible. Bees are the primary pollinators. The seeds may be widely dispersed by birds and mammals, but germination can be reduced up to 15% after passing through an animal gut. In the southern portion of its range, highbush blueberry seeds have thick seed coats and require cold stratification before germination. Those from northern regions produce thinner seed coats and germinate in the autumn after dispersal.

Plants of highbush blueberry can be propagated by seeds or cuttings.

Occasionally sprouting has occurred from root-crowns after top kill by fire or disturbance. Plants have also been noted to produce root sprouts that emerge 1-2 meters away from the parent plant.

Management

Ideal soil for cultivation is moist, high in organic matter, highly acidic (4.5-5.5), and well-drained. The plants grow in full sun to partial shade, but those in open sites produce more flowers and have brighter fall foliage color.

Pests and Potential Problems

Insects, diseases and wildlife pests need to be controlled in commercial production.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Improved varieties for commercial berry production are readily available. Non-selected materials for conservation use are also available from nurseries.

Prepared By:

Guy Nesom

Formerly BONAP, North Carolina Botanical Garden, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Kathy Davis

USDA NRCS National Plant Materials Center, Beltsville, Maryland

Species Coordinator

Gerald Guala

USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the

PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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