

Growing Small Fruits

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Growing berries, grapes, and currants

Many small fruits—strawberries, currants, blackberries, grapes, blueberries, and raspberries—are well-suited to Maryland's growing conditions. Small fruit plants are generally long-lived. If you're planning to grow them, pay special attention to cultivar selection and site preparation. Cultivars should be adapted to your soil and climatic conditions. If possible, select cultivars with the fewest insect and disease problems.

Buy the best nursery stock available from reputable nurseries that guarantee their plants to be true to name, of high quality, and packed and shipped correctly. Place your order early, specifying the cultivar, size, grade of plants desired, and preferred time of shipment. It is best to have the plants arrive when you are ready to set them out and have the planting site prepared well in advance of planting.

When your order arrives, unpack the bundles and inspect the plants. The roots should be moist and have a bright, fresh appearance. Shriveled roots indicate that the plants have been allowed to freeze or dry-out in storage or transit. Such plants seldom survive. Plant roots must be kept moist and free from freezing temperatures at all times.

If the plants cannot be set out immediately, they should be kept in cold storage by wrapping them loosely in a plastic bag with some holes cut for ventilation and storing them at a temperature just above freezing. Moistened peat moss, sawdust or shredded newspaper can be used to keep roots from drying. Strawberry plants, in small quantities, may be held in the home refrigerator for a few days. If refrigerated storage is not available, remove the plants from the bundle, and carefully plant them in a trench of moist soil in a shaded location (this is called “heeling-in”). Pack the soil firmly around the roots to eliminate all air pockets and to prevent the roots from drying out.

Comparison of Small Fruits

Common Name	Genus/Species	Origin	Grow without Pesticides	Notes
Strawberry	<i>Fragaria X</i>	N.A./S.A. cross	Yes	June-bearing and day-neutral are best
Blueberry*	<i>Vaccinium spp.</i>	7 native MD species	Yes	Northern highbush, Southern highbush, and rabbiteye (Southern MD and Eastern Shore only) will all grow in MD
Grape	<i>Vitis labrusca</i> <i>Vitis vinifera</i>	North America/ Asia	No/Can be Difficult	Many good seedless table grapes available. 'Concord' not well-adapted to the warmer sections of MD
Blackberry	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	North America	Yes.....but	Many choices; trailing, thornless cultivars can be difficult to control in a small area
Raspberry	<i>Rubus idaeus and Rubus spp.</i>	North America	Yes....but	Many choices; primocane-bearing are easiest to manage
Currant*	<i>Ribes spp.</i>	Europe and North America	Yes	Easy, underutilized plants. Red, white, and black cultivars. Plant more than one cultivar with black currant
Gooseberry*	<i>Ribes spp.</i>	Europe N.A.	Yes	Need 2 different cultivars, like currants

Common Name	Genus/Species	Origin	Grow without Pesticides	Notes
Hardy kiwi* a	<i>Actinidia spp.</i>	Asia	Yes	Rampant grower
Elderberry*	<i>Sambucus</i>	North America	Yes	Fairly large plants
Beach plum*	<i>Prunus maritima</i>	East Coast, U.S.	Yes?	Wild, native plum; unreliable fruiting. For the adventurous gardener
Black chokeberry (<i>Aronia</i>)	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>	North America	Yes	Astringent but healthful fruit. Good for juice and jelly. Good wildlife plant

*These fruits usually require two cultivars (cross-pollination) for the best fruit set.

a-hardy kiwi has the potential to escape cultivation and establish in woods.

Chart: Prepared by Jon Traunfeld, University of Maryland Extension; 2/16

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Growing, Selection, and Planting Grapes

Growing Gooseberries, Currants, Elderberries