

## **Red, White & Blueberry: A Guide to Blueberry Picking**

Blueberries are considered the perfect “super” food, known for their health benefits, antioxidants and vitamins. Like any other fruit, there are many varieties of blueberries. For a patch to flourish, a patch needs variety so plants can cross-pollinate. We currently grow seven varieties of blueberries here on our farm. We also bring in bumblebees to help pollinate our blueberry bushes every year – the blossoms are much deeper than most other fruit blossoms, which means they’re less likely to be self-pollinated by wind. Bumblebees have a longer proboscis than a honeybee, so they are the perfect insect for the job! Growing and harvesting these frosty blue fruits is a labor of love. Blueberries do not like to have “wet feet”, meaning they need a well-draining soil so that during wet, rainy periods, they’re not sitting in wet soil. So, for this reason, they grow really well in sandy soil – New Jersey grows a ton of blueberries for this reason! Our soils here on our farm and in PA are not naturally loamy, we added sand into our planting where our blueberries are to help create that environment. We also mounded up the rows where we planted our bushes, again to give a better opportunity for drainage.

Now is the perfect time to enjoy the fruits of that labor. A typical blueberry season in our area runs mid-June through late July. Blueberry picking is a popular summertime activity. No matter if you’re picking from your own patch or at a Pick Your Own farm like ours, here are some important tips to provide a successful experience.

**Prepare for sun.** Blueberry season lands during the peak of summer. Be prepared with sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat. Don’t forget to bring water to stay hydrated while you pick.

**Don’t pick alone.** Bring the family or a friend, or two. You’ll enjoy the company while having someone share the load of picking. Some of the best stories are shared in the berry patch.

**Be patient.** Not all blueberries ripen at the same time. Pick and choose the fat, round berries with a light gray-blue color. No matter how tempting it is, don’t pick clusters. Look below the surface and under leaves for the ripest fruit. Experienced pickers know they’ll be rewarded for digging deep.

**Commit to a bush.** Little ones will likely want to jump from bush to bush picking the easy to grab berries, but if you pick a bush and pick it clean, you will save SO much energy.

**Blueberry aftercare.** Do not put berries that are warm from sun in a closed bag or container. Once you get home, leave your berries out on your kitchen counter for the rest of the day/overnight – they’ll continue to “blue up”, for those that were still a little on the purple side. Ripe blueberries last longer in the fridge. Be sure not to rinse until you are ready to eat.

Now that you have some tips and tricks of the trade, make plans to Pick Your Own Blueberries soon. The blueberry season is short and you don't want to miss out on fresh, local berries. Our PYO blueberries are open daily: Monday-Saturday, 8am-4pm and Sunday, 12-4pm.

Hollabaugh Bros. Fruit Farm and Market is located in Biglerville, just 10 minutes north of Historic Gettysburg, PA. The market can be reached at 717-677-8412.