Small Fruits for the Home Garden

Small fruits are perennial plants that produce an edible crop. They are small in size and are ideal for the home garden. Fruit is the edible reproductive part of the plant. Small fruits which are successful in home gardens include blueberries and cranberries, brambles, strawberries, grapes, figs, currents and gooseberries.

- Choose the right site. All small fruiting plants need 8 hours full sunlight, a source of water and a weed-free soil. A pH range between 5.5 and 7.5 is ideal for all small fruits except blueberries and cranberries, which require an acidic soil of pH 4.8 to 5.2.

- Blueberries (*Vaccinium*) are small, native, woody shrubs which can be either highbush (cultivated) or lowbush (wild) varieties. Cranberries are native wetland fruits that grow on trailing vines. They each require full sun and a generous water supply in a site which drains well. Blueberries produce better with cross-pollination, so planting more than one variety is a good idea.

- Brambles (*Rubus*) are canes. They are planted in early spring, at least 6' apart. Brambles include blackberries and red, black, yellow or purple raspberries; there are thorned and thornless varieties of each. Brambles spread by underground rhizomes. Fruiting occurs on second year canes; prune dead canes close to the ground after fruiting.

- Strawberries (*Fragaria ananassa*) need 12" between plants. Raised soil rows are ideal for strawberries; allow 3' between rows for spreading. Plant June-bearing, one-year old plants in early spring; remove flowers the first year.

- Grapes (*Vitis vinifera*) are vines that need support and severe pruning to encourage fruiting. Plant grapes in early spring. The winter after planting, select one cane to prune back to 10 buds. Each bud produces a horizontal fruiting branch, which should be trellised.

- Currents, figs and gooseberries are small shrubs that need 4' between each bush. A site with 8 hours of sunlight is preferable (currants need 5-6 hours). Plant one-year old shrubs at least 4' apart and mulch to conserve moisture. Fruiting occurs at the third year.

Checklist for May

**Flower and Vegetable Garden**

- Use Mother’s Day as a rule of thumb for planting summer-blooming annuals and tender vegetables outside.

- Cover tender plants if a frost is expected.

- Plant summer blooming bulbs.

**Lawn**

- Use spot treatment to control broadleaf weeds.

- **Avoid evening watering and over-fertilization of lawns with nitrogen to prevent diseases.**

**Trees and Shrubs**

- Remove spent rhododendron and azalea blossoms and apply a fertilizer for acid-loving plants. See Rutgers Fact Sheet FS 1146 “Rhododendrons and Azaleas: Injuries, Diseases and Insect Damage” for more information. [http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1146](http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS1146)

- Remove and destroy bagworms that have overwintered on evergreens.

- Peak deer tick nymph activity begins this month. See page one and back cover for additional information on ticks.