

## Landscaping with Small Fruits

*by Michael Timm*

By definition, small fruits refer to fruits that are small and are borne on small bush like plants. The problem is that we tend to concentrate only on their ability to produce fruit and overlook their ornamental values. Blueberries, Elderberries, Bush Cherries, Currants and Grapes are prime examples of some small fruits that not only please the palette, but make tremendous landscape plants.

Blueberries have become one of the most popular small fruits for home gardeners. Besides offering tasty fruit, the leaves turn a blaze red in fall which can rival any Red Maple in beauty. These plants are easy to care for and are very pest free. The only trick to growing blueberries successfully is maintaining an acid soil condition. There are many ways to acidify your soil and the only one that I wouldn't recommend is aluminum sulfate. Aluminum sulfate can change the flavor of the fruit. If you can grow other acid loving plants, like Rhododendrons, you can grow blueberries!

One word of caution, rabbits love to nibble on the bush itself, so protection may be necessary.

Elderberries are not only cherished for their fruit, but also their spring flowers. 'Black Beauty' is one variety that offers burgundy foliage along with great flowering and fruiting. These plants can basically grow anywhere as long as the site isn't overly dry. They do benefit, and grow better, in soils high in organic matter. As an added bonus, the flowers are also edible and they make a great sun tea. Add a few flower clusters to a gallon glass jar filled with water with and a bit of lemon juice and sugar. Set it in the sun for a day, strain it and enjoy.

Bush cherries bear small cherry like fruit and are easier to grow than traditional cherry trees. These plants are extremely ornamental and can be used anywhere in the landscape. 'Hansen's Bush Cherry' is a great example. It has gorgeous white spring blooms with silver green summer leaves that turn crimson in autumn. These plants can reach a mature height of 5 feet.

Currants are extremely hardy plants which are easy to grow, and offer great interest in the landscape. I have currants planted along my garage, and I found they make a great hedge. Black currants are more upright, and the reds and whites are more sprawling. The dark glossy green leaves look great in the landscape. If you've never grown currants, you're missing out on a great tasting berry. These plants are very productive and besides making great jellies, the berries both freeze and dry well.

Grapes can also be a great addition to the landscape. Try growing grapes along a split rail fence, or any fence for that matter, and create a living wall. They can add a tropical look to any area with their large leaves and twining vines. They do require a little work in pruning, but don't let that scare you away. Grapes are very forgiving when it comes to pruning, and these practices are easy to learn.

I've only given you a few examples of how small fruits can play a major role in your landscape, and I hope you give some of them a try. Like I've always said, any plant that not only looks great in the landscape, but also offers a tasty treat, is a bonus in my eyes. Happy Gardening!