

Gardening to Eat!

If we planted all the fruit and vegetables guaranteed to make us healthier and younger we would run out of space and be too young to garden. I read that Goji berries are an anti-aging wonder. The list of benefits is quite astonishing and they are available dried. I suppose they will appear eventually in the aisle alongside dried cranberries and raisins.

Goji berry is also known as wolfberry, *Lycium barbarum* cv. Ningxia. They are native to China where they are grown as a commercial crop. The plants are often available from nurseries having a lot of specialty herbs. It is a vining shrub that grows eight to ten feet tall. Lavender bell-shaped flowers appear in May and continue through the summer, followed by orange/red berries. These shrubs are self-fertile and drought resistant once established and they do well in full or half-day sun.

Another delicious small berry is that of the shadbush, Amelanchier. The tree near my front door was briefly beautiful laden with white flowers and the red/purple/black fruit so bountiful one of the branches broke. Amelanchier was called shadbush as its bloom heralded the run of shad from ocean back to their home streams. It is probably more accurate today to call it Juneberry. Amelanchiers are native to Europe and Asia as well as here.

The one called Downy Serviceberry, *L. arborea* is multistemmed and shrubby and the one commonly seen here is *L. Canadensis*. The big book says the different species hybridize freely, a marvelous way to avoid pinning down an identification. One species *A. x grandiflora* (*A. arborea* x *A. laevis*) has been bred for spectacular fall color. Lovely small tree for edge of a woodland.

If you have had strawberry shortcake made with local berries, you may have decided to grow them since nothing matches the flavor of fresh picked, unshipped berries. Strawberries would be a fine crop for a sunny porch or patio. With container gardening galloping from flowers to food, this is a good time to experiment with those berries recommended for container culture as it gets them up off the grounds for easier picking.

Strawberries, *Fragaria* are either June bearers, providing just one crop although by selecting early, mid-season, and late varieties, you will have them for weeks, or they are everbearing. The everbearing plants should be set into a larger space about a foot apart. As runners form they should be cut back to keep the plant forming the crowns that produce fruit. Most everbearing or day neutral varieties have a large early crop with a lighter crop continuing into fall. Using a raised mulched would make keeping the weeds out less of a chore.

'Fort Laramie', an everbearing type is suggested for hanging baskets and containers as it has the ability to fruit on its runner plants. Another, 'Seascape' does well in containers over a long productive season. A new day neutral plant, *F. ananassa* 'Toscana' is both tasty and beautiful as it has large, two-inch flowers of a dark pink. It would be a charming basket dweller as the flowers are followed by inch to inch and a half sweet berries. Each plant yields up to two pounds of fruit on a plant that is six to eight inches high and 18 to 24 inches wide.

Because they are so fragile, raspberries are truly a luxury, made affordable only by being homegrown. Many of us experiment with growing these bramble fruits but find handling the thorny canes discouraging. They really are worth the effort so you must brave the thorns and prune them! For summer-bearing raspberries, after the plants are established, all the 2-year canes must be cut out right after the last berry is picked. The next spring before the new growth starts the remaining canes need to be thinned out, leaving three or four of the largest canes to each row foot.

The everbearing types offer you an option. If you are willing to wait until early fall for a larger crop, you can cut back all the canes at ground level in the fall after the first frost. This way

does lose a summer crop so if you want a continuous supply of berries rather than cutting them back drastically, you can cut them back to about two and a half feet once dormancy sets in and those canes can be removed the next summer after their berries are picked. Can you see that the successful growers of raspberries are those gardeners paying such close attention, that they know canes from canes?

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