

What's Wrong With My Blueberry?

A Quick Diagnostic Guide — Start with what you see, follow the arrows to the fix.

The #1 Rule: Before you add fertilizer, spray anything, or panic — **test your soil pH**. Ninety percent of blueberry problems are pH problems. If your pH is above 5.5, fix that first. Everything else comes second.

LEAF SYMPTOMS

Yellow Leaves

? **Are the veins still green while the rest of the leaf is yellow?**

YES Iron Chlorosis — The soil pH is too high and iron is "locked" in the soil.

→ **Fix: Test pH. Apply Elemental Sulfur (long-term). For a quick green-up, drench soil with Chelated Iron (a liquid iron formula the roots can absorb even in imperfect soil).**

NO Nitrogen Deficiency — The whole leaf is a uniform pale yellow, veins and all.

→ **Fix: Switch to an Ammonium-based fertilizer (like Ammonium Sulfate or a blueberry-specific formula). If you recently mulched with fresh sawdust, increase nitrogen by 50%.**

Red or Purple Leaves

? **Are the older, lower leaves turning red between the veins (a "Christmas tree" look)?**

YES Magnesium Deficiency — Common in very acidic, sandy soils.

→ **Fix: Dissolve 1 tablespoon Epsom Salts in 1 gallon of water and apply as a soil drench.**

NO Potassium Deficiency — Leaf tips or edges look "burnt" or curled upward.

→ **Fix: Apply a balanced blueberry fertilizer that includes potassium. Check that you aren't over-watering, which can leach potassium from sandy soils.**

Brown, Crispy Leaf Edges

? **Has there been a recent heatwave, dry spell, or strong wind?**

YES Leaf Scorch — The thin leaves are losing moisture faster than the shallow roots can replace it.

→ **Fix: Water deeply. Increase mulch to 4 inches to keep roots cool. Consider a windbreak if the site is exposed.**

NO Salt Burn or Fertilizer Burn — Possible salt buildup in the soil, especially in containers.

→ **Fix: Flush the soil with a deep, slow watering (the "Salt Flush"). If using synthetic fertilizer in pots, reduce concentration and water thoroughly after each application.**

FRUIT & FLOWER SYMPTOMS

No Fruit at All (Healthy Green Bush)

? **Did the bush bloom (produce flowers) this spring?**

NO Chill Hour Mismatch — The plant didn't get enough winter cold to trigger flowering. This happens when a Northern variety is planted in a warm climate.

→ **Fix: Check your variety's chill requirement vs. your zone. If mismatched, you may need to replace with a low-chill or Southern Highbush variety.**

YES, BLOOMED Pollination Failure — Flowers appeared but didn't set fruit. Either there's no second variety nearby, bloom times don't overlap, or cold/rain kept bees from flying.

→ **Fix: Plant a second variety ("Buddy System") with overlapping bloom time. Add pollinator-attracting plants like lavender nearby.**

Berries Are Mushy or Collapsing

? **Do the berries look fine on the outside but feel squishy or "deflate" when touched?**

YES Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) — An invasive fruit fly that lays eggs inside ripening fruit. Larvae feed inside, causing collapse.

→ **Fix: Harvest frequently (every 1-2 days). Remove all overripe or fallen fruit immediately. Set apple cider vinegar traps to monitor. Consult your County Extension for spray timing.**

NO Overripe or Rain Damage — Berries left too long on the bush or swollen from heavy rain can split and soften.

→ **Fix: Pick berries promptly using the "Tickle Test." After heavy rain, harvest immediately to prevent splitting and mold.**

Shriveled, Grey, Hard "Mummy" Berries

Fruit turns grey, hardens, and shrivels into a "mummy"



Mummy Berry Fungus



Remove & destroy every mummy — never compost them.

Rake mulch in early spring to bury spore cups. Improve air circulation by pruning and spacing bushes properly.

WHOLE-PLANT SYMPTOMS

Plant Wilting Even Though Soil Is Wet

Leaves wilt or droop despite wet or soggy soil



Root Rot (Phytophthora)



Improve drainage immediately — this is an emergency.

Move to a raised bed or mound. Do NOT add more water. If roots are brown and mushy, the plant may need replacement.

Flowers Suddenly Turn Brown and Die (Spring)

? Did this happen after a cold night or frost event?

YES Frost Damage — Blooms that were already open froze overnight.

→ **Fix: Not reversible for this season. Next year, cover bushes with burlap or frost blankets when late frost is forecast. Never use plastic.**

NO Bacterial Blight — Look for dark, water-soaked streaks on the twigs. Common in cool, wet springs (Pacific Northwest especially).

→ **Fix: Prune out infected wood 6" below damage. Apply copper-based spray in fall and again before buds open in spring. Avoid late-summer nitrogen.**

Plant Just Isn't Growing (Sitting There for Months)

? Is the plant in a container or heavy clay soil?

YES Root-Bound or Compacted Soil — Fine blueberry roots can't push through dense material. In pots, roots may be circling the container wall.

→ **Fix: "Pot Up" to the next size container and tease roots apart. For clay, amend with pine bark and consider a raised bed.**

NO pH Problem (Most Likely) — Even with good soil texture, if the pH is above 5.5, nutrients are locked out and the plant will stall.

→ **Fix: Test your soil pH. Apply Elemental Sulfur and be patient — the biological process takes several months to lower pH.**