

How to Propagate *Vaccinium myrtillus*



Beyond Blueberry Picking: How to Propagate Delicious *Vaccinium myrtillus* at Home

We all know and love the delicious blueberry, but have you ever heard of its close cousin, *Vaccinium myrtillus*? Commonly known as bilberry, this European native boasts small, intensely flavored berries that put their cultivated counterparts to shame. While you might find bilberry jams and treats at specialty stores, nothing beats the satisfaction (and flavor) of harvesting these gems from your own backyard.

But how do you get started? Bilberries, unlike their blueberry cousins, can be a bit more finicky to cultivate. But don't worry, we're here to demystify the process and guide you through propagating *Vaccinium myrtillus*, step by step.

Understanding the Bilberry's Needs

Before diving into propagation, it's crucial to understand what makes *Vaccinium myrtillus* thrive. These plants are lovers of acidic soil (pH 4.5-5.5) and dappled sunlight, mimicking their natural woodland habitat. They also prefer well-drained, humus-rich soil that stays consistently moist but not waterlogged.

Propagation Methods: Seeds vs. Cuttings

1. [Seed Propagation](#):

- **Source:** Harvest ripe bilberries, gently crush them, and rinse the seeds. You can also buy seeds from reputable nurseries.
- **Sowing:** Sow seeds in a mixture of peat moss and perlite during fall or early spring. Lightly press them into the surface and keep the soil consistently moist.
- **Patience:** Germination can be slow and erratic, taking anywhere from a few weeks to a few months.
- **Pros:** Economical and can result in numerous plants.
- **Cons:** Slow and requires patience; seedlings may not inherit desired traits from parent plants.

2. Cutting Propagation:

- **Timing:** Take cuttings in late spring or early summer from healthy, non-flowering stems.
- **Preparation:** Choose stems about 4-6 inches long, removing leaves from the lower half. Dip the cut end in rooting hormone (optional but recommended).
- **Planting:** Plant the cuttings in a well-draining potting mix, burying at least two nodes below the soil line.
- **Environment:** Keep the cuttings in a humid environment, using a humidity dome or placing the pots in a sealed plastic bag.
- **Rooting:** Roots should form in 6-8 weeks. Once established, transplant into individual pots.
- **Pros:** Relatively faster than seeds, ensures plants are

genetically identical to the parent.

- **Cons:** Slightly more challenging than sowing seeds.

Caring for Your Bilberry Propagations

Whether starting from seed or cuttings, consistent care is key to success:

- **Moisture:** Keep the soil consistently moist, but avoid overwatering, which can lead to root rot.
- **Light:** Provide bright, indirect light. Avoid direct sunlight, especially for young plants.
- **Fertilizer:** Feed with an acid-loving fertilizer diluted to half strength every 4-6 weeks during the growing season.

The Reward of Patience

Propagating *Vaccinium myrtillus* might require some effort, but the reward of fresh, flavorful bilberries straight from your garden is undeniably worth it. With patience and care, you can enjoy these little treasures and add a touch of wildness to your backyard haven. So why not roll up your sleeves and embark on this rewarding horticultural adventure?