

## Guide to Growing Cranberries

The cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), closely related to blueberry, is a creeping evergreen peat-loving prostrate shrub. The berries are ready for picking from late September in the south of England to mid-October in Scotland; they vary in size up to 12mm (1/2in) diameter, are oval shape and vary in colour from bright to dark red. The flesh is firm, dry and with a palatable acid flavour.

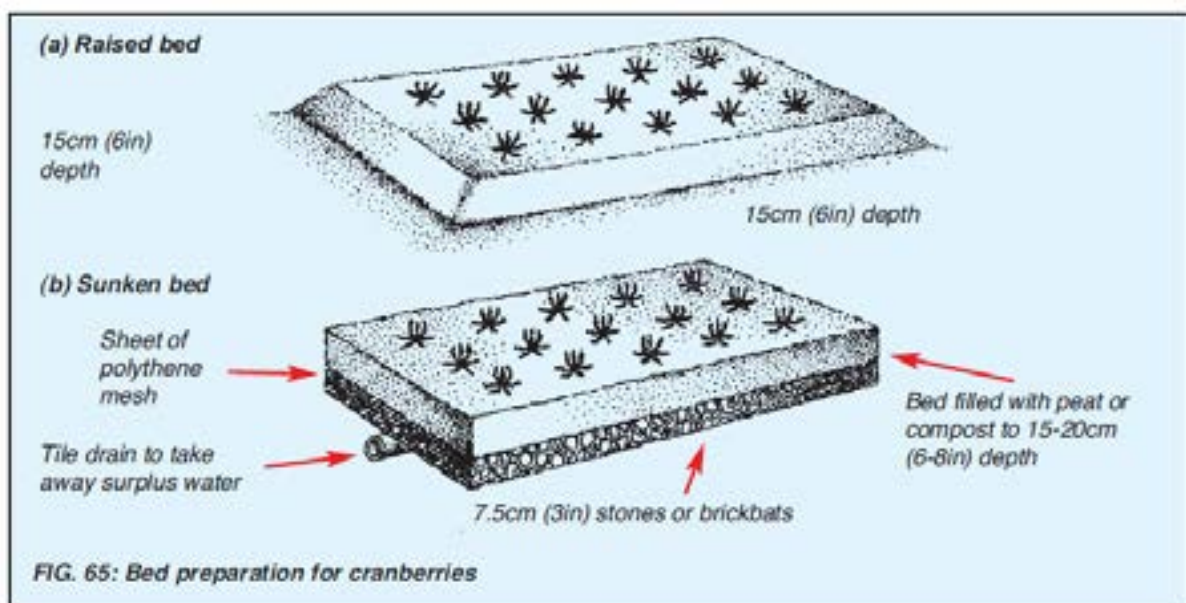
Cranberries grow naturally in peat bogs which have acid soils and are well supplied with water. It is possible to imitate these conditions in the garden and once a raised or sunken bed is established it requires very little attention, alternatively they can be grown in pots.

### GROWING CONDITIONS

Cranberries must be provided with an acid growing medium that is retentive of moisture but at the same time is not waterlogged. The plants must receive an adequate water supply throughout the summer.

### BED PREPARATION

The soil on which the bed is to be sited or which is to be incorporated in the bed should be reduced to pH 4.5 in accordance with the instructions for preparing soil for growing blueberries (click here for further details ). There is a choice of making a raised or sunken bed (see fig. 65); the former is simpler to make, as it is then only necessary to place 15cm (6in) of horticultural peat, which contains no added nutrients or lime, on top of the area of treated soil that is to be planted with cranberries; the latter is more satisfactory as it conforms to the general level of the garden and is easier to water and maintain.



A sunken bed should either have a subsoil that drains excess water from the overlying topsoil or, if there is any doubt about its ability to drain naturally, then artificial drainage should be provided. If the natural drainage is perfect, the bed should be excavated to a depth of 15-20cm (6-8in); if imperfect, to a depth of 25-30cm (10-12in). A tile or plastic drainpipe should be sunk into the floor of the bed to lead surplus water to a ditch or sump. The bed should then be covered with lime-free stones or brickbats over 2.5cm (1in) in diameter to a depth of 7.5cm (3in). These should be covered with a sheet of polythene mesh to prevent the compost or peat, with which the bed will be filled, from clogging up the drainage material. For this purpose old polythene compost bags in

which numerous drainage holes have been made, would be suitable. The bed should be filled with either horticultural peat or two parts of peat and one part of soil, or three parts of peat and one part of coarse sand. Heavy clay soils should not be used as they are almost impossible to mix with the peat satisfactorily.

## **PLANTING IN BEDS**

After planting, the bed should be covered with 2.5cm (1in) of coarse lime-free sand. This is not absolutely necessary but it prevents the surface of the peat from drying out; it gives some weed control, as fewer weeds germinate in sand than do in peat, and it provides a medium in which the cuttings root easily. The bed should be watered with lime free water using the gentle spray from a watering can until the peat is saturated.

## **MANURING A NEWLY PLANTED BED**

During the first year the objective should be to obtain rapid growth by the judicious application of fertilizer, to get a good cover of the bed with new shoots. Harm could be done by exceeding the following rate of application. Broadcast over the bed:

In April: 20g/m<sup>2</sup> (½oz/yd<sup>2</sup>) Phostrogen.

In May: 10g/m<sup>2</sup> (¼oz/yd<sup>2</sup>) Phostrogen.

In June: 10g/m<sup>2</sup> (¼oz/yd<sup>2</sup>) sulphate of ammonia.

In July: 10g/m<sup>2</sup> (¼oz/yd<sup>2</sup>) sulphate of ammonia.

Alternatively, an ericaceous fertilizer may be used following the manufacturer's recommendations. Any fertilizer that has lodged on the plants should be washed off with a quick sprinkling of water.

## **ANNUAL CULTURE**

Vines are the horizontal shoots that creep over the surface and extend the area of the bed. Upright shoots grow from the vines. These are 5-7.5cm (2-3in) long, they flower during June and bear fruit in September/October. Pruning should be carried out after harvest, cutting off any vines that have been pulled to the top of the bed and any upright shoots that have been damaged during picking. When the bed is fully established and covered with shoots, pruning carried out in March should firstly consist of judiciously thinning out vines and upright shoots that are overcrowded and secondly, trimming the edges of the bed. Three to five months elapse before the plants fully cover the surface of the bed.

## **SANDING**

Every four years 1cm (½in) depth of sand should be applied to the bed in early winter. This is not absolutely necessary but it can be beneficial by encouraging the vines and uprights to form more roots, and when necessary grow more vigorously.

## **MANURING AN ESTABLISHED BED**

If, at the end of March, the peat in the bed has not been saturated by winter rainfall, the bed should be watered until the peat is saturated. During April, broadcast over the bed the same fertilizers, at the same rate as advocated for the first year.

## **WATERING**

The amount of water that a bed requires depends upon the natural rainfall that occurs. It would be better to err on the side of over-watering provided that the bed had good drainage when it was first made. Beds in gardens situated in the wetter northern and western districts of the U.K. will require less additional water than those situated in the drier districts of central and south-east England.

It would be unlikely for beds made up with a large proportion of peat to require an application before the middle of June. If after that, a period of two to three weeks drought occurs, the bed should be saturated with lime free water, using gentle spray from a watering can. If using tap water, it is best to use it in conjunction with ericaceous fertilizer which will neutralise the lime in the water. In large beds, mains water free from lime should be available for application to the bed using a garden sprinkler. A hosepipe should not be used as it would disturb the sand and peat too much.

## **HARVESTING & STORAGE**

In southern England, the berries ripen from late September onwards when the first ripening berries develop their full colour. Cranberries will keep for two to three weeks at moderate room temperatures, for two to three months in a refrigerator at 2-4°C and almost indefinitely deep frozen. They require no preparation apart from being dry and being placed in sealed polythene containers.