



Growing Berries for Food and Fun: Notes from the Northwoods

Sue Robishaw

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Picking fresh berries from your own home-grown plants is a treat no matter where you live, but in the cold short season climate of the northern Midwest there is a special satisfaction. Between the long winters, short summers, wild critters, busy schedules and varied weather it is a real joy to finally hold in your hand sun ripened fruit that you were involved in bringing into being. Getting to that point is well worth the journey. And this book helps you get there. With her usual enjoyable conversational style Sue Robishaw takes the reader along the paths she has traveled over some forty years on their northwoods homestead to bring strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and grapes into their lives. Full of practical down-home information this is a book to be used. It is for those who want to grow their own fruit in their own backyard gardens, large or small. It is also just plain fun to read. Hers is an organic approach to growing and she doesn't pretend to always have picture-perfect plots or absolute solutions. Yet she happily harvests an abundance of fruit even if some years are up and some years down, and she helps the reader to do the same. Along with important notes on preparing ground, choosing varieties, planting, caring, maintenance, and harvesting, the information on the protective cages she and her husband, Steve Schmeck, designed and built to keep the birds away from the strawberries and blueberries are invaluable. These are long-term structures meant to last for many years and go beyond the quick but often inadequate and temporary netting fabric often used. Whether for building your own from her descriptions and photos or to get ideas to design your own to suit your own plants this will be an important part of the book for many backyard fruit growers. The author draws on her own experience in her own garden to share what she has learned from both the successes and the not so successes. Along with many photos, she provides how-to information as well as inspiration to encourage the reader to glean from the pages whatever they need to be successful in their own berry adventures. While the goal is certainly to harvest healthy ripe fruit, the journey and relationship with the growing plants and the soil they are living in is intertwined throughout the book. Their homestead is in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, with a zone 3 climate, so her focus is often on how to get ripe fruit in spite of weather challenges. But there is also plenty of information that will be of interest and use to those who garden in warmer climates. This book is a welcome update to the many articles by Robishaw published in the past in "Countryside Magazine" (under 'Notes from the Northwoods'), as well as in her earlier book "Homesteading Adventures" which covers their first twenty years on their homestead. Though "Growing Berries" is geared toward those who want to grow their own small fruit it is also an enjoyable read as a look into the gardening life of this popular homesteading writer.

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