

Greenwood Nursery

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Planting & Growing Blueberries

Preparation:

Blueberry shrubs can grow and fruit for generations with a little regular maintenance. First, you will want to site them in a sunny area that has well drained soil that is in the pH range of 4.5 to 5.0. Test the soil and adjust as needed. If the soil tests a higher pH level, sulphur should be added to the soil to reduce the pH level. Aged compost, coffee grounds, wet peat, pine bark and pine needles are ways to reduce the pH naturally.

They do require regular watering during the growing season, especially during the flowering and fruiting periods.

Many of the blueberry varieties are self-pollinating. However, for larger crop production at least two varieties of blueberries should be planted. As with all fruiting plants, for cross-pollination the two varieties selected should bloom at the same time.

Planting:

Space plants about 4 feet apart in rows that are 6 to 10 feet apart, depending on space available. Plant in holes that are approximately 10 inches deep and 12 to 18 inches wide. Plant with the root collar just above the ground and fill in the holes with soil. Water well. It is normal for the soil level to drop after watering as the watering helps to remove the air pockets still left after backfilling. Apply more soil if the level dropped and then top with 3 inches of mulch. Surround the plant with mulch leaving a well at the plants base.

Tip: After planting, cut off 1/3 of the top of the plant. For the next 3 years, cut off small weak lateral shoots and thin out excessive bushy growth. After the third year, begin cutting off the oldest wood each year.

Care:

As plants establish themselves, maintenance will consist of removing dead, broken, or diseased branches and generally shaping the bush. In spring during blooming, thin the blossoms out to prevent the branches from overloading and breaking from the weight of the fruit.

Fertilizing should be done based on the results of soil tests. If no soil test is available, apply about 2 tablespoons of fertilize per plant (granular timed release). This can be repeated in about 3 to 4 weeks.

Pruning:

Here is a link to the University of Tennessee Extension site with detailed pruning information on blueberry bushes to keep them healthy and producing for generations.

<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/spfiles/SP284-E.pdf>

Tips:

The berries are ready to harvest when they reach a full size and are dark blue in color. The best way to store the berries for use is to remove the stems and check them, wiping the berries off with a cloth if necessary and put them in a zip-lock type freezer bag. Do not rinse or wash the berries before freezing. Otherwise, the berries will turn mushy as they thaw. When baking items, such as muffins or bread puddings, add berries from the freezer directly into the batter. They will thaw and cook with the heat of the baking just perfectly without creating any blue residue in the mixture.