



Blueberry Culture

Site

Blueberries grow best in a sunny location. Plants will tolerate partial shade, but as shade increases, plants produce fewer blossoms and fruit production declines. Avoid areas surrounded by trees, which provide too much shade, compete with plants for water and nutrients, and interfere with air movement around plants.

Soil Preparation

Blueberry plants are long-lived (30 to 50 years or perhaps even longer), so spending time and effort in preparing the planting location is a wise investment.

Blueberries need:

1. Acid soil – pH 4.0 to 5.0
 2. Well-drained soil
 3. Plenty of organic matter in the soil
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1. Soil pH can be determined by a soil test. Contact your local Cooperative Extension Office for information on this. Soil that is not within the above pH levels should be amended **BEFORE** planting. Based on your soil test your extension office will make recommendations as to what steps you should take to attain the proper soil pH. If you are planning to plant several blueberries together prepare the entire bed rather than digging holes for individual plants.
 2. Blueberries require good drainage. They cannot tolerate a water table higher than 14 inches below plants. If there is a high water table, make a raised bed up to 18 inches high and 3 feet wide to create proper drainage for the blueberry site. Blueberries are not bog plants and can develop root rot in saturated soil.
 3. The incorporation of peat moss in the planting site is beneficial not only for soil acidification, but also for improving the soil through the inclusion of organic matter.

Planting

At planting, dig a hole 18 inches deep and 18 inches wide and mix 1 cubic foot of peat moss with top soil until the hole is filled 4 inches from the top. Set the plant and cover the roots with the remaining peat-soil mix. Set plants 4 to 5 feet apart with rows 10 feet apart. Apply 4 inches of sawdust or wood-chip mulch in a 2 feet wide band after planting and maintain a 4 inch depth over the life of the planting.

Care of the Planting

1. In the first year, remove flowers in the spring to encourage vegetative growth. Doing this is essential for healthy plants in the following years. The production of flowers and fruit deters growth when plants are too small or weak. A good-sized, healthy canopy is needed to support the fruit.
2. Blueberries are in the same plant family as azaleas and rhododendrons (Ericaceae), and an azalea fertilizer formulated for acid-loving plants work well for a small planting. The need for fertilizer will be indicated by plant growth and foliage color. Generally one application of an acid-producing fertilizer each year will be sufficient. The best time to fertilize is right before or during the change from bud to bloom. Do not fertilize after the blooming period; late fertilizing will encourage late growth in the fall which can cause winter injury.