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Care Guidelines

BLUEBERRIES

Cultural Requirement: Blueberries prefer an acid, well-drained soil. Our soil tends to be alkaline (high pH) (opposite of acidic). Before planting, you should mix peat in with your soil and perhaps some sand for hard, clay soils. The shallow, compact root system of blueberries makes regular irrigation a necessity. Mulching has proved beneficial in soils that are not ideal for blueberry growing. Fine to regular-grind soil aid (bark dust) should be applied to a depth of 2"-4" to conserve moisture.

Fertility: Apply ¼ pound of Ammonium Sulphate per plant per year to well-balanced mineral soils with mulch not less than 4" deep. Apply it in early spring on the surface of the mulch in a broad ring around the plant. The size of the plant is not important. On organic soils without mulch, the addition of Phosphorus or Potassium or both may be more important than the addition of Nitrogen. Complete fertilizers, such as 5-10-10, are recommended for these soils.

Planting Instructions: Many blueberry plants ultimately reach a height of 6' or more with a 4' spread or more. Therefore, the rows should be at least 8' apart while no two plants should be closer than 6', unless a hedge is desired. The top of the root clump should be close to the surface if mulch is used, or about 4" deep without mulch.

Fruit Production: Two different varieties must be planted to ensure best cross-pollination for fruit set. The early varieties begin ripening in June, and the late varieties in early August. When planting 2- or 3-year-old plants, the blossoms can be removed for a year or two to promote vegetative growth. Blueberries tend to over-bear rather than under-bear. Thinning of the blossoms will promote larger fruit and a healthier bush.

Pruning: After the plant has established itself, one may remove old tired wood that is loaded with too many fruit buds and too few leaf buds. Some of the thrifty vegetative wood may be removed to prevent the plant from becoming too sprawling or too high. Blueberries become sweeter as they hang on the bush. The only possible reason to pick early (as they turn blue) is to escape predatory birds. Home gardeners often protect their plants from birds with netting. A large plant may have 15 to 20 pounds of fruit and is worth protecting.