

HIGHBUSH BLUEBERRIES



Cultural Requirements - Blueberries prefer well drained soil and will tolerate a acid soil. Their shallow, compact root system makes regular irrigation a necessity. Mulching has proved beneficial on soils which are not ideal for blueberry growing. Fir sawdust or bark dust, applied to a depth of two to four inches, eliminates much of the need for cultivation and conserves moisture.

Fertility - For well balanced mineral soils with sawdust mulch not less than four inches deep, an application of 1/4 pound of Amonium Sulphate per plant per year is ideal. It should be applied 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 a 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 - Blueberries ultimately reach a height of six feet or more with a four foot spread or more. Therefore, the rows should be at least eight feet apart while no two plants should be closer than six feet, unless a dense hedge is desired.

The top of the root clump should be close to the surface if a mulch is used, or about four inches deep without mulch.

Fruit production - The early varieties begin ripening in June, and the late varieties in early August.

When planting two or three 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 nets. A large plant may have 15 to 20 pounds of fruit and is worth protecting.

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PRUNING

Highbush blueberries need annual pruning after they reach 5 or 6 feet in height in order to produce large crops of big fruits. A mild day in late winter or early spring is a good time to get out there with your clipper. For the first few years, prune the bush only as necessary to get it into a sturdy upright shape, but after it begins to produce good crops, cut out all wood that shows signs of age, and thin out any of the branches that are crowding each other. Whenever the twiggly ends of the canes appear too thick, thin them out. Cut back the tops of any plants that are growing too high. This pruning will open up the bush and let sunshine in so the berries will ripen better, and allow you to harvest them more easily.

Different cultivars grow in different ways, so prune them according to the needs of each individual bush. You can easily determine when older canes should be cut back completely to the ground, and when they should be cut back to the main trunk. Bushes sometimes set more fruit plants than is good for the plant. When this happens, thin out some of them so you will get fewer but larger berries. On dormant plants you can easily distinguish between the fat fruit buds and the thinner leaf buds.