

BLUEBERRIES

BLUEBERRIES-PLANTING AND CARE MADE SIMPLE

Blueberry plants may start to bear a few fruits the second year after planting, but they are slow growers and take many years to reach full production, so it is best to start with two- or three-year-old plants. After you have made sure the soil is acidic enough for blueberries, and added manure and peat, till it thoroughly. Blueberries are shallow rooted and have no root hairs, so the soil must be loose for them to start growing well. Unlike deep-rooted plants, they must find all the moisture and nutrients they need in the top several inches of soil.

Blueberries need cross pollination, so plant at least two different cultivators. It is even better to plant three different ones not only to ensure pollination, but so that if one dies, two will still be left. Blueberry blossoms are not especially fragrant and therefore not as attractive to bees as most other flowers so always mix up your plantings and keep the different cultivators close to each other. If you set 20 Herberts in one block and 20 Earlblue in another some distance away, the same bee may not find both kinds.

You can plant potted blueberry bushes almost any time that the ground isn't frozen, but plant bare-rooted kinds only in the spring in the North, and in spring or fall in the South. Set highbush blueberries 5 feet apart, and space the rows 7 to 9 feet apart. Unlike lowbush plants, these do not spread by underground rhizomes.

Water the small bushes directly after planting, with water to which you have added a small amount of liquid fertilizer, such as manure tea, fish emulsion, or Windmill Garden's own 20-20-20. Continue to water every other day, and add the liquid fertilizer once a week for the next three to four weeks. This will help the plants get over their transplanting shock and encourage rapid healthy growth. Add mulch to protect the roots, and check weed growth.

You can easily damage the shallow roots by hoeing or cultivating, so pull out any weeds that penetrate the mulch. Even with mulch, the shallow-rooted blueberries are apt to dry out in prolonged spells of dry weather, so you may have to water them often. With care, your blueberry plants should produce well for several decades.

PESTS

One of the nice things about blueberries is the small number of insects and disease that bother them. Large commercial plantings are more vulnerable, but home gardeners have far less to worry about and may never encounter any serious disease or harmful insect. The blueberry maggot and the cherry fruit worm are the most common troublesome insects, but if you clean up all the old fruit each year before winter, it should discourage them. Wasps and plum curculio may also show up, and if these or any other insects persist, Ortho Home Orchard© dust should control them quite effectively.

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