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SERIES



www.windmillgarden.com

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# 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 do better with cross pollination, so plant at least two different cultivators. 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.

You can plant potted blueberry bushes almost any time that the ground isn't frozen. 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 nice thing about blueberries is the small number of insects and diseases that bother them. 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.



Peach Sorbet Blueberry is one variety that looks lovely in containers.

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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 twiggy 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.