

BLUEBERRIES

Blueberries are not only a tasty treat in the summer, but have excellent landscape value. Recent introductions of varieties are easier to grow, with berries that are sweeter and larger.

Blueberries are fussy in two ways: they like constant moisture and acidic soil. Fortunately gardeners can address these needs quite easily. The addition of organic matter, sulfur or aluminum sulfate will often modify the soil's pH level sufficiently. Flowerland can test your soil's pH level for free. Use a mulch to maintain constant soil moisture. Shredded bark applied at the base of the plants will do the trick nicely. Drip irrigation or porous hose is the professional way to ensure constant soil moisture. It's best to provide proper soil preparation.

Blueberries want full sun. Plant them 4 to 6 feet apart. Dig the hole about 12 inches deep and three times the width of the container the plant came in. Set the plant at the same shallow depth as it was planted in the container. Back fill with your peat soil mix and water thoroughly.

Install mulch shortly after planting. After the first growing season, blueberries will benefit from an Azalea and Rhododendron fertilizer. Pruning will not be necessary the first year. The largest healthiest fruit is produced on vigorous stems of the previous years growth. Remove fine twiggy growth each winter to encourage strong new branching.

Blueberries are relatively pest free ... but in order to prevent rabbits from doing a complete winter pruning job, build a wire enclosure around the plants. As soon as fruit ripens, you'll find that birds will want to harvest the berries before you have a chance. Use bird netting to protect your fruit.

Blueberries are the easiest fruit to freeze. After harvesting, put the berries directly into plastic bags or containers and into the freezer. Do not wash berries before freezing, otherwise they'll stick together. Thaw at room temperature. Blueberries are great for pies, cheese cake, dessert topping or on breakfast cereal.

