



Blueberry Culture Tips

Blueberries require highly acidic soil conditions for best results. Few backyard soils in Indiana are naturally acidic enough to grow quality blueberries. The blueberry grower must, therefore, make extra effort to acidify the soil before plant establishment. Then the acidity level must be maintained over the life of the planting. Due to the special concerns associated with the rather demanding soil requirements of growing the crop, the soil must be amended with organic matter and the pH must be corrected before proceeding to establish the planting.

Soil pH should be in the range of 4.5→5. Most soils in our area (southern Miami County) have a natural pH of about 5.8→6.8. To lower the pH on these soils, add 3 to 4 lbs. of granulated sulfur to 100 sq. ft. of area. This should be done 3 to 6 months before planting the blueberry plant. Soil pH should be checked yearly. Check the pH no sooner than 3 months after soil modifications have been made. It is useless to attempt to lower the pH where limestone is near the surface or is evident in the soil.

At planting, dig a hole 18 in. deep and 18 in. wide and mix 1 cubic ft. of sphagnum peat moss with the soil. Set the plant in the hole with the soil level of the pot level with the ground; cover the roots with the remaining peat-soil mix. Set plants 5 ft. apart with rows 10 ft. apart. Apply 4 in. of sawdust or wood-chip mulch in a 2-ft. wide band after planting, and maintain a 4-in. depth and 4 ft. band over the life of the planting.

The highbush blueberry requires full sun for optimum yield and quality. Fertilize at planting with ¼ cup of ammonium sulfate or ½ cup of 12-12-12 per plant. Keep fertilizer at least 6 in. away from plant. In the following years, apply ¼ cup of ammonium sulfate or ½ cup of 12-12-12 per plant at bloom and again four to six weeks later. If plant leaves become chlorotic, add another 2 lbs. of granular sulfur/100 sq. ft., working it into the ground and mulch.

Blueberry bushes have very shallow root systems and are very sensitive to water fluctuations. In dry seasons, supplemental watering is essential to obtain good yields of high quality products. However, do not apply water after early September unless soil is very dry. Highbush blueberries do not absolutely require two different cultivars for cross pollination purposes. However, bigger berries and high yield will result from cross pollination. Thus, it is desirable to plant at least two different cultivars.

Generous use of mulches like sawdust or peat moss will help control weeds, conserve moisture, and keep roots cool. Increased organic matter from decomposing mulch will help improve soil structure and nutrient uptake of the blueberry bush. Replenish mulch as needed to keep the mulch depth at 2 to 4 in.

Information taken from the Ohio State Publication HYG-1422-98.
For more information: <http://plantfacts.osu.edu>