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Growing Blueberries

Site – Choose an area with full sunlight. The spot should have good drainage, as blueberries like moisture but not standing water. Avoid heavy clay or very dry sand. Plants should be where they can be kept watered.

Soil – Blueberries prefer an acid soil – a pH range of 4.0 to 5.5 is good. ***This step is critical for Blueberries.*** In proper soil pH they are quite carefree, but if the pH is too high, they will be a constant headache. Amend the soil before planting using a mixture of compost (or rotted leaf mold) and peat moss. Use a ratio of roughly 50% amendments / 50% original soil to about the depth of a shovel. Amend and slightly mound the entire planting area, not just the planting hole. Also, add Prolizer Plant Starter and aluminum sulfate or Espoma Soil Acidifier according to directions.

Planting – Set at least two varieties for cross pollination. Thoroughly water the plant in the pot before planting. Set plant in hole at a depth that keeps level of soil in pot even with ground level or slightly above. Using the rest of the soil mixture, fill in around edges and cover any top roots with 1” of soil. **Do not set blueberries too deep.** Pack soil firmly around roots. Commercial growers set blueberries 4 ½ to 5 feet apart, but the home gardener can plant according to the space available.

Mulching – A good mulch is helpful for plant growth and water retention. Avoid Hardwood mulch as it tends to raise soil pH. Use Pine Bark Mulch instead. Some growers use Peat Moss as mulch – it holds down weeds for the current year and adds organic matter to the soil. Do not pile mulch against the stems.

Fertilizer – Do not apply fertilizer until 4 weeks after planting (over-fertilization the first year may burn the plants.) Each subsequent year, add fertilizer at blossom time and again a month later. Use small amounts when the plant is young and gradually increase the amounts slightly each year until the plants reach maturity at 4 to 5 years. Choose a complete fertilizer, 10-10-10 or *Osmocote Flower & Vegetable* (14-14-14). If you prefer liquid feed fertilizers, use Miracid or *Jack's Classic Acid Special*. For organic growing choose *Natural Alternative Plant Food* (5-5-5) or *Hollytone* (4-3-4). **Do not apply fertilizer in late summer or fall**, as it may make the plants more subject to winter injury.

Pruning – No pruning should be necessary for 3 years. While dormant, however, weak branches (less than 8” long) should be removed each year. When the plant has reached full maturity, it will probably be necessary to remove some of the heavier branches in the center to allow air and sunlight to penetrate. Continued attention to pruning can extend the life of plants for many years to come.