

Ison's Nursery & Vineyard

Planting Instructions

BLUEBERRY PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

Blueberry Requirements

1. Location: Need Full Sunlight and Well-Drained Soil. Plants will tolerate partial shade, but as shade increases, plants produce fewer blossoms and fruit production declines. Avoid areas surrounded by trees, which provide too much shade, compete with plants for water and nutrients, and interfere with air movement around plants. Poor air movement increases danger of spring frost injury to blossoms and favors disease development.

2. Soil: Blueberries require acid soil with a pH of 4.5 to 4.8. We highly recommend you have your soil checked to ensure the proper pH. You can take a soil sample to your local County Extension Office. If the pH is too high, the growth of the plant is slowed and the foliage turns yellow. If the pH is too high for an extended period of time, the plants will die. Remember: Blueberry plants are long-lived so considerable time and effort in preparing the soil is a wise investment.



When the pH is too high, ground sulfur or ammonia sulfate should be applied to increase the soil acidity. Five hundred pounds of sulfur per acre will change pH of 5.5 to 4.4 in lightly sandy soils. If pH is too low, dolomitic limestone applied at necessary rate will raise the pH. Soil test should be made annually.

3. Pollination: Rabbiteye varieties do require cross-pollination. They require the transfer of pollen to one variety from a different variety for proper fruit set. The cross-pollination results not only in increased fruit set, but, for many varieties, also in an increase in berry size, seed content, and earlier ripening of berries. We recommend that you have at least 3 different varieties planted to get the maximum fruit set.

3. Spacing: We recommend a spacing of 3 to 5 feet between plants for hedging but you can go further as needed. Plant rows about 10 feet apart.

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1. Set them out as soon as possible. If you cannot set them within a few days, then heel them in or keep them in cool, moist place and make sure the roots do not dry out.

2. Planting - When digging the planting hole, remember that blueberry plants have a dense, shallow root system. A wide hole will be more important than a deep one. To prepare the planting hole, dig it deep enough to allow the plant to be placed in it at the same depth as it grew in the nursery (you can often see a soil line on the branches) and wide enough to allow the roots to be spread out completely. Add five to six gallons of soaking wet peat moss to each planting hole and mix it 50-50 with the soil. (You will need to prepare the peat moss prior to planting. Break up the peat bale and wet it with a hose. It is easier to soak it for several days in a tub of water. Once your peat is soaking wet, it will do a good job of holding soil moisture for your plants. Don't ever throw dry peat moss into the planting hole and then try to water it in. The dry peat will actually draw moisture away from your new planted blueberry plant, weakening or possibly killing it.) Make somewhat of a dirt mound in the middle of the hole to set the plant on. Adjust the plant to set at the proper height, spread the roots out fully, and fill the hole back in with the soil. Firm the dirt with the heel of your foot and water it well.

3. Mulch - Mulch the plants with 4 to 6 inches of pine straw, ground pine bark, or well rotted sawdust. Surface mulch helps maintain uniform soil moisture and will also discourage weed growth. Replenish the mulch as needed. (Note: We do not recommend using leaves, grass clippings and/or layers of newspaper, that mat down and will deprive the blueberry roots of needed oxygen.)

4. Water – Water the plants frequently enough to keep the soil moist but not saturated.

5. Fertilization – Roots are very sensitive to readily soluble fertilizers and can be injured with excessive amounts. So be sure and do not over fertilize these plants, as it can cause root burn. Plants should be fertilized twice during the first growing season; early March with two ounces of 12-4-8. Keep fertilizer at least one foot away from plants in a circle. You could also use Azalea Food Fertilizer or Miracle Grow's Product called Mir-Acid. This should be repeated again in mid-June. If you notice yellowing on the plants, you can use one ounce of ammonia sulfate. Note: Do not use Calcium Nitrate around plants.

Fertilization for Older Plants: See Table 1 below for recommendations. The following is another good way to get excellent results: Apply Osmocote 18-6-12, ¼ pound per plant in mid-March. This is a slow release fertilizer and will last six to nine months. This will not burn the roots and should be placed in the middle of the plants. Miracid 30-10-1-soluble fertilizer with iron chelate is an excellent fertilizer for foliage if applied as manufacturers recommend. It will not burn plants and will give quick results.

Table 1: Suggested fertilizer rates for blueberries:

Amount of fertilizer per plant	
Growing season (leaf)	12-4-8(a) or ammonium sulfate
Newly set	2.0 ounces .75 ounces
1st(b)	2.0 ounces .75 ounces
2nd	4.0 ounces 1.5 ounces
3rd	4.0 ounces 2.0 ounces
4th	6.0 ounces 3.0 ounces
5th	8.0 ounces 3.5 ounces
6th and older	10.0 ounces 4.0 ounces

(a) A typical acid base fertilizer analysis available for azaleas and camellias.

(b) First growing season is referred to as 1st leaf, with subsequent seasons as 2nd leaf, etc.

6. Harvesting: To get the highest quality berries, harvest 4 to 6 days after the berry turns completely blue. If picked earlier the berries will not be as large and the flavor will not be as fully developed. Berries picked when not completely ripe will ripen off the bush – but the quality will not be as good as if it ripened on the vine.

7. Protection From Birds: Birds present one of the worst problems of any pest. They are especially frustrating for the small grower. Nearly any kind of Bird will eat your berries. The most effective type of bird control is netting. You can cover individual bushes for nearly 100 percent bird protection. A durable, synthetic netting made of nylon and treated to resist deterioration from ultraviolet rays will usually last for several seasons. Place the netting over the bushes as the first fruits begin to ripen and remove it when harvesting is complete.

