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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. Dig holes approximately 16” deep and 16” wide. If soil acidity is lacking, mix half the soil from hole with rotted leaf mold or peat moss. Also add 2-3 oz. ammonium sulfate along with ¼ lb. cottonseed meal. Return part of this soil to hole to level needed.

Planting – Set at least two varieties for cross pollination. Soak bushes in water for about an hour before planting. Set plant in hole at a depth that keeps level of soil in pot even with ground level or slightly below. 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. Create a mounded edge around hole for water retention. Commercial growers set blueberries 4 ½ to 5 feet apart, in rows 8 to 10 feet apart. The home gardener can set according to the space available. Blueberries can be used in the garden or for hedge planting.

Mulching – A heavy mulch is helpful for plant growth and water retention. Wood chips, sawdust, or natural organic matter is satisfactory. NOTE: for each bushel of sawdust used, it is necessary to add 13 oz. ammonium sulfate or 8 oz. ammonium nitrate.

Fertilizer – Do not apply fertilizer until 4 weeks after planting. Then apply 2 oz. of ammonium sulfate in a circle approximately 12” from the plant. (Over fertilization the first year may burn the plants.) Each subsequent year, add 2 oz. of fertilizer at blossom time and 2 oz. a month later. Increase the amounts slightly each year until a total of 8 oz. per plant is reached on larger 4 to 5 year old plants. Choose either cottonseed meal, a complete fertilizer of 10-10-10 or 8-8-8, Hollytone, or a garden center premix for azaleas, hollies or blueberries. **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.