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How to Grow Organic Blueberries

Blueberries one of Connecticut's very best native shrubs. They are an excellent addition to your landscape for their delicious, antioxidant-rich fruit. But they aren't just for the eating! They make excellent ornamental shrubs, with white flowers that are pollinated by bumblebees. Their foliage that goes from deep green to bright red or orange in the fall. They're easy to maintain and great for the whole family.

Blueberry Terms

Northern Highbush (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)- Tall and upright. Fruit ripens in mid-late summer. Can grow 6-8 or more but are easily kept smaller by pruning.

Lowbush (*Vaccinium angustifolium*)-A low, sprawling shrub that usually doesn't exceed 24". Mid-late summer berries. The fruit is smaller and very sweet.

Half high- Cross of Highbush and Lowbush. Very hardy bushes that are around 1-4' tall. An excellent choice for smaller landscapes.

Soil pH* - A pH of 7.0 is considered neutral. pH lower than 7.0=acidic. pH higher than 7.0=alkaline.

Blueberries like a pH of 5.5-6.5

Take a soil test before you plant your blueberry patch. We recommend the University of CT Soil Lab

<http://www.soiltest.uconn.edu/>

Bring a copy of your soil test with you when you come in to Natureworks so we can best help you prepare your soil.

How much light do blueberries need?

Although you may find both high and lowbush blueberries growing in the woods, if you are growing them for fruit, locate your blueberry bushes where they get at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day. If they are in lower light, they will still grow but will have few flowers and fruit.

Blueberries as landscape plants

Home gardeners often put in a blueberry patch, where early, mid, and late season plants are grouped together. In Nancy's home garden, she planted 9 plants, 3 of each type. The benefit of planting them together is that if you want enclose them with bird netting, it is easy to do. Pollination is also enhanced by grouping them together.

Another way to incorporate blueberries in your yard is to use them as landscape shrubs. They are highly ornamental and support our native bumblebees as well as the birds. Weave 3-5 highbush blueberries into a shrub border. Grow them as an edible hedge to feed the birds. Incorporate half high blueberries into a perennial border as a form of edible landscaping. There are so many ways you can add blueberries to your landscape!

Planting your blueberry bushes

Blueberries are so easy to grow. Amend your soil with **Coast of Maine Penobscot Compost** and an organic granular fertilizer such as **Healthy Grow Acid Fertilizer** which is ideal for acid loving plants. If your soil is too sweet for blueberries, apply **Soil Acidifier** by Espoma to slowly lower the pH. This is a very safe, slow acting product.

Pick out your favorite variety of blueberries. We recommend having at least two different types for the best cross pollination, the most fruit and an extended harvest season. See plant tag for spacing requirements- it will vary depending on the type chosen. Water in with liquid seaweed or Sustane Compost Tea at time of planting to help the feeder roots grow quickly. Mulch thickly with Mainly Mulch shredded straw.

Can I grow blueberries in containers?

Yes! We carry Bushel and Berry blueberry bushes that are bred specifically to grow and produce well in containers.

Maintaining your Blueberries

Monitor the rainfall in the summer. Water deeply if the weather is dry, especially as your fruit is forming.

Each spring, feed with a mixture of **Coast of Maine Penobscot Compost** and an organic granular fertilizer for acid loving plants such as **Pro Holly**. Avoid fertilizing late in the season or in fall to prevent new shoots from forming late in the season as they will be young and tender, thus susceptible to winter damage.

Because blueberries bloom on last year's (old) wood, if you prune them in late winter or early spring you will cut off potential flower buds and fruit. However, before your blueberries flower and leaf out is the ideal time to prune and broken or damaged branches. As the plants break dormancy, remove any dead wood.

Pruning is easy and important for invigorating your blueberries. As your plants mature, occasionally prune out old wood (branches that are around 4 years old) and less productive branches. You can also decongest areas of the bush that have several crisscrossing branches. Try to keep branches that are growing outward and remove those that are growing into the center. You can reduce the height of your highbush plants so that it is easier to harvest. Pruning very tall, leggy branches also enhances branching, creating a stronger plant with more flowers and fruit.



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