

BLUEBERRY CULTURE

Planting:

Most folks I've spoken with prefer to establish a small-scale blueberry patch with perhaps 2-4 individual plants rather than anything on a larger scale. I therefore am basing my recommendations on planting individual blueberry bushes. Before going into further detail, please keep in mind the following:

- Blueberries need a pH of 4.5-4.8 (very important)
- Do not plant too deeply
- Choose two different varieties that bloom at the same time for cross pollination
- Choose a well-drained, sunny site (minimum 6 hrs.)

First of all check your pH. If you are in the above range (which is very low even for our acidic soil conditions), then there is no need to apply a sulfur product at this time. If soil pH is too high, my plan will work just fine. ***Note**- Please refer to noursefarms.com if you plan on a large number of plants. There you will find a helpful chart for sulfur application rates.

My grandmother always said, "Dig a \$10 hole for a \$1 plant," and I live by that rule for everything I plant. **So for one bare root blueberry plant:**

- Dig a hole about 14" wide x 14" deep.
- Place back in the hole 2/3 of your existing soil mixed with 1/3 *Coast of Maine* Dark Bark mulch.
- Incorporate 1 cup *Espoma* Soil Acidifier and 2/3 cup *Espoma* Holly-Tone organic fertilizer into the soil mix. This will not burn and will give the plant a boost at the same time it gently adds an acidifier.
- Create a depression about as deep as the blueberry roots are long.
- Set plant so roots are delicately separated and extend downward.
- As hole is filled in, make sure that the crown (where stem and roots meet) remains at soil surface.
- Firm soil around plant and water well.

Place 2-3" of bark mulch around plant and keep weed-free. SBC cedar mulch is a good choice; do **not** use dyed mulches. I very much like using pine needle mulch, as it contains no weed seeds, moderates soil temperature on my hot site, has a woodland look, and slowly adds acid as it breaks down. Cheap, too!

Maintenance:

With care your blueberry bushes should provide nutritious berries for 15-20 yrs. Now that's a good investment!

- It is very important to maintain your optimal pH of 4.75, so test your soil every year or two.
- Fertilize with Espoma Holly-Tone in late April at the recommended rate of application. If things look a little peaked or overall look like bushes need another boost later in the season, fertilize one more time in late June- but **never** later than that. It's important that the plants ready themselves for winter; fertilizing later can cause damage.
- Prune out diseased or damaged wood in March. Good sun penetration initiates good bud formation.
- I highly recommend netting plants when berries are still green. Birds LOVE blueberries as do many other mammals large and small. Certainly some sort of a permanent framework with a net coverage allows easy access and is ideal. Of course, you can plant a lot, share it with wildlife and hope you get your share!
- HAPPY BLUEBERRYING!