

Wallsend Nurseries



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Blueberries

The American Indians, living in areas where blueberries grew wild, would dry them for eating in the Winter & for treating upset stomach problems. More recently blueberries have supposedly been found to reduce the insulin requirements of diabetics & to help control urinary tract infections. The Bilberry, a European relative of the blueberry is said to improve night vision & retard ocular degeneration.

In 1997 the US Dept of Agriculture found that blueberries contained the highest level of antioxidant activity of any fruit or vegetable tested. Antioxidants combat the free radicals within the body. These free radicals come from smoking, air pollution & the products of normal use of Oxygen during respiration. Excess free radicals within the body are thought to cause most of the disorders associated with ageing. The US Dept of Agriculture studies went on to see if Blueberries would cause a recovery from free radicals of Oxygen. Blueberries were found to be very effective. Their antioxidant activity is not reduced by freezing either. Eating half a cup of berries each day will provide a large part of the daily antioxidant activity required to maintain peak health and delay ageing.

Blueberries belong to the Azalea Family and require similar growing conditions.

Height of the bushes varies, according to variety chosen, but the average is about 3m (10').

The plants are long lived at 30 years plus. Fruit has a waxy bloom, borne in bunches on the ends of the branches, & ripens from early Summer to Autumn, depending on location & variety.

Prepare the soil as you would for any long-term crop. Addition of organic matter as well as an application of fertiliser at the recommended rates is a good idea. A "Citrus" style fertiliser is quite good enough, or you could use an "Azalea" or "Rose" fertiliser with equal surety. Don't forget to pay special attention to the drainage as these plants will rot or die if the soil is wet over a long period. pH needs to be slightly acid as for Azaleas..... 4.5-5.5 will be adequate in all cases. this is considerably less than most plants prefer. If in doubt buy a pH soil test kit. These are cheap & will provide accurate readings on soil acidity. Blueberries also like a high Phosphorus level in the soil.

Blueberries rarely do really well unless they are planted in full sun although some varieties will tolerate partial shade.

Planting distances between larger growing varieties should be 1.2m between plants and 3-4m between rows. When planting be sure to plant no deeper than the plant was originally in the pot otherwise stem rot is a likely result.

Tease out the roots at the bottom of the root ball so they will spread into the freshly prepared soil.

Mulch the plants well after planting. Suitable mulches include sugar cane mulch, cow manure (not poultry manure) and straw.

Remove flowers for the 1st couple of years of the plant's growth to encourage a strong bush. Plenty of water is essential during the hot months of Summer.

Fertilize with a Citrus or Azalea fertiliser at regular intervals as suggested by the manufacturer throughout the growing season. Shortages of Copper, Iron & Magnesium are common. Trace elements applied regularly will help prevent these deficiencies as will closely watching the soil pH.

Pruning can be restricted to dead or diseased wood removal. Initial pruning can be carried out to shape the plant if required but is not really a necessity.

Pests and diseases are not usually a problem but it's a good idea to spray regularly with a Copper based fungicide during late Winter through to late Summer.

Blueberries can be used fresh & do store and freeze well. They can be used for jams, pies, sauces, icecream, etc.