

# STARTING RIGHT with BLUEBERRIES

by *Fall Creek Farm & Nursery*

Blueberries bring a unique combination of delicious fruit and striking ornamental beauty to the garden and landscape. Blueberries are easy to grow, require little care, and are seldom bothered by pests. If a few basic steps are followed your blueberry plants can thrive and last a lifetime.

## VARIETIES

Blueberry varieties are distinguished by their climate suitability and ripening season. Be sure to choose varieties suited to your area. You may want to select varieties that ripen at different times or feature large fruit (best for fresh eating and desserts) or small fruit (best for muffins and pancakes). Bushes with brilliant fall colour or different growth habits offer the gardener lots of choices to use throughout the landscape. For blueberry lovers, allow at least two plants per family member.

## SITE SELECTION AND PREPARATION:

Select a sunny location in well drained soil free of weeds and well worked. Locate in an area where irrigation water is available as best results will be obtained by keeping the root zone moist throughout the growing season. Where the soil is poor or marginally drained, raised beds 1m to 1.20m (3-4') wide and 25 to 30cm (8-12") high work very well for blueberries.

A fail safe way to grow blueberries in almost any soil is to incorporate peat moss into the planting medium. For planting directly into the ground, work up a planting area approximately 75cm (2.5') in diameter and one foot deep. Remove 1/2 to 1/3 of the soil. Add an equal amount of premoistened peatmoss and mix well. One 4 cubic foot compressed bale will usually be sufficient for 4-5 plants. For raised beds mix equal volumes peatmoss with acid compost or planting mix. Blueberries thrive in acidic soils. Your garden centre representative can recommend a soil acidifier if necessary for your area. Sulphur pellets (Tiger 90) at a rate of 1 teaspoon per 1 gal. size plant, applied on the soil surface after planting. If you are not using a lot of peat.

## SPACING

Blueberries can be planted as close as 75cm (2.5') apart to form solid hedgerows or spaced up to 1.85m (6') apart and grown as individual specimens. If planted in rows, allow 2.45m to 3m (8

-10') between the rows depending on equipment used for mowing or cultivating.

## PLANTING

For container stock remove from pot and lightly roughen up the outside surface of the rootball. Set the top soil line of the plant about 2.5 - 5cm (1-2") higher than the existing ground and firm around rootball. Mound soil up along sides of exposed root mass. Water in well.

## MULCHING

Blueberries do best with a 5-10cm (2-4") mulch over the roots to conserve moisture, prevent weeds and add organic matter. Bark mulch, acid compost, sawdust, grass clippings, etc. all work well. Repeat every other year.

## PRUNING

It is important that blueberries get established before allowing them to bear fruit. Thereafter, they should be heavily pruned each year to avoid overfruiting which results in small fruit or poor growth.

Remove all blooms as they appear the first year. In years thereafter, follow these steps after the leaves have dropped.

- Remove low growth around the base. If it doesn't grow up, it gets pruned out!
- Remove the dead wood, and non-vigorous twiggy wood. Select for bright coloured wood with long (at least 75cm (3") laterals. Remove blotchy coloured short growth.
- If 1/3 to 1/2 of the wood has not been removed by the above steps, thin out the fruiting laterals and small branches until this balance has been obtained.

## FERTILIZING

Blueberries like acid fertilizers such as Rhodo or Azalea formulations. For newly planted stock, use 2 tablespoons of 10-20-10 (or similar fertilizer) in late spring or once plants are established. (Careful! Blueberries are very sensitive to over fertilization!) For subsequent years, use 1 ounce of fertilizer for each year from planting to a total of 250ml (8 oz.) per plant. Apply in early spring and again in late spring for best results. Always water well after fertilizing.

For organic fertilizers, blood meal and cottonseed meal work well. Avoid using fresh manures.

## **BLUECROP** MID SEASON ~

Considered the best all round variety for consistent yields, large, high quality fruit and disease resistance. Bluecrop is an upright, open growing bush to 4-6 feet. There are other varieties with better ornamental value but none better in the garden.

## **BRIGITTA** LATE SEASON ~

Easy to grow hybrid yields one of the highest quality berries available. The fruit is large, light blue and firm with a crisp texture. The flavour strikes a perfect balance - sweet yet very slightly tart. Brigitta berries have amazing shelf life. The slightly spreading bush is a fast grower with deep green foliage and bronze tinted new growth.

## **CHANDLER** MID TO LATE SEASON ~

Chandler is living proof that bigger is better! With fruit size of cherries and surprisingly delicious flavour, Chandler holds the distinction of being the world's largest blueberry. Another great feature is Chandler's long ripening season that will provide you a bounty of fresh picked fruit for over six weeks. The bush is vigorous with large dark green foliage and a slightly spreading habit reaching 5-6 feet high.

## **DUKE** EARLY SEASON ~

Medium to large light blue berries with a mildly sweet flavour. The attractive berry is quite firm and retains its fresh quality longer than most varieties. Duke blooms late but ripens early, which protect the blossoms from spring frosts. It is one of the heaviest, most consistent producers, often yielding over 20 pounds per bush when mature. Duke bushes are upright growers but the branches will droop to the ground when laden with fruit. The foliage turns yellow-orange in fall.

## **HARDYBLUE** MIDSEASON ~

Hardyblue is an old established variety in the Northwest that is known for its superior flavoured, exceptionally sweet berry. Hardyblue has a reputation for being quite adaptable to many soil types, including heavier clay soils. The upright vigorous bush supports heavy crops of medium sized, dark blue fruit perfect for muffins and pancakes. Brilliant yellow-orange foliage in the fall gives way to dark red wood in winter.

## **LEGACY** LATE SEASON ~

Foliage will turn bright orange in colder climates but here on the West Coast the leaves stay green with lighter fall hues. Legacy plants are vigorous, upright to 6 feet and slightly

spreading. Heavy producer. The berries are medium large, light blue with a robust blueberry flavour.

## **NORTHCOUNTRY** EARLY MID SEASON ~

Dark green foliage and compact growth reaching 1.5 to 2 feet and 3.5 feet in diameter is vigorous and adaptable in less than optimum soil types. Fall foliage is scarlet red. Fruit is medium size with an appealing sweet, "wild" blueberry flavour. Yields will range between 2 to 5 pounds per mature bush. With its unique characteristics, Northcountry is one of the best varieties for the edible landscape.

## **NORTHSKY** MID SEASON ~

The bush grows to a low compact mound about 12-18 inches tall and 2-3 feet wide. Northsky begins spring completely covered in snow-white blooms. The foliage is dense, with small glossy green leaves in summer and brilliant red fall colour. The berries are small with a dusty bloom that gives them a beautiful sky blue colour. Flavour is similar to wild blueberries. Yields range from 1-2 pounds per bush. Well suited for container grower, borders or group plantings in the landscape. Self-fertile.

## **SPARTAN** EARLY SEASON ~

Spartan features one of the most attractive and best flavoured berries of any cultivar. It is light blue, very large (often covering a quarter) with a delicious tangy sweet flavour. It is an easy to pick upright bush reaching 5-6 feet at maturity. The large glossy green leaves turn orange and yellow in the fall. Spartan can be particular about soil types, requiring well-drained sandy loam with lots of organic matter.

## **TORO** MIDSEASON ~

Toro has striking, full, heavy clusters of giant sky blue fruit. Toro was named for its stocky, compact bush habit. While not as fast a grower as some of the other varieties, Toro is an outstanding ornamental blueberry. The flowers turn from hot pink to bright white and contrast nicely with the bronze coloured spring foliage. The deep green summer foliage turns to the richest of reds in fall.