

## BLUEBERRIES

There are many blueberries native to North America but the favourite varieties for cultivation are the high bush types such as, Bluecrop, Bluejay, Blueray, Collins, Duke, Earliblue, Herbert, Nelson, Jersey, Northblue, Northland, Northsky, Patriot, Rancocas and Spartan. (Varieties subject to availability). With proper care, your blueberries will reward you with succulent fruit.

### LOCATION

Blueberries do best in a sunny location and they require an acidic soil between 4.5 and 5.5 on the pH scale. (The level of acidity or sweetness of soil is measured on a scale from 1 to 14 and is called the pH scale, 7 on the scale is neutral). When planting blueberries, add plenty of organic matter, peat moss or triple mix will work well. Soil should be well drained. Keep in mind that blueberries can be self-fruiting but they will need at least one partner of another variety to ensure a heavier crop or yield. Cross-pollination will occur when other varieties of blueberries are planted together. This causes the berries to increase in size, number and promotes earlier ripening times.

### PLANTING

The soil should be amended prior to planting by digging out a planting bed to a depth of at least 2'. The existing soil should be removed leaving only 1/3 to mix with new organic material. Mix 1 part garden soil with 1 part peat moss and 2 parts triple mix. This creates a rich, acidic environment necessary for transplanting. Install good drainage by breaking up the 'hardpan' (the hard crust at the base of the hole) with a pitchfork or pick axe. Add pea gravel or coarse sand to the base of the hole. This allows water to drain away from the roots. The blueberry bushes themselves should be planted 3 - 4' apart and the root flare should be level with the existing grade. Water well after planting and add a layer of mulch to prevent weed development and to aid in acidification. Remember to give your blueberries a slow, deep watering once a week.

### FERTILIZER

Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer (20-20-20 or 7-7-7) for the first few years. Older plants may be fertilized with an Azalea/Rhododendron food at 3 – 4 week intervals, which contain acidifiers. Applications of aluminum sulphate, garden sulphur or Plant Prod's Ever-Acid can be supplemented to acidify the soil during the growing season.

### HARVEST

Blueberries are harvested mid to late summer. Before the berries turn blue, cover each bush with bird netting to prevent crop damage or loss. Do not pick the blueberries as soon as they turn blue. Allow them to ripen for a week or two for a fuller flavour.

### PRUNING

Prune about half of the upper branches when planting. After this initial pruning, the plant will not need to be cut back for three years. After three years, blueberries should be pruned annually. Remove any broken or damaged wood, remove the weak lower branches, small twigs (less than 6" long) and as the plant matures it may be necessary to prune out the old woody branches.

Blueberries do demand certain soil conditions, and without these necessary requirements, crop failure may result. The High Bush blueberries are such long-lived and fruitful plants that it is worth the effort in preparing an appropriate planting bed.