

How To Successfully Grow Blueberries In Redding

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 15, 2017

Q. I have been reading about the health benefits of eating more blueberries and I am wondering if they will grow well in Redding?

A. Yes, blueberries will grow well in Redding. There is nothing more delicious than picking ripe berries right off the bush.

There are a couple of things that you need to do to ensure your success. First make sure that you get the correct variety. Blueberries require chill hours to set fruit. Redding is a “low chill” area, meaning that we on average get fewer than 800 chill hours. The southern highbush type of blueberry is well adapted to our area as it requires fewer chill hours but can grow to over 6 feet tall. But there are some newer varieties such as “Sunshine Blue” that are more compact in size and can even be grown in a container.

Blueberries are self-pollinating but will produce more and bigger berries if you plant at least two varieties; do make sure that both varieties will bloom during the same time. Choosing earlier ripening varieties may also help as some years we get very hot in June.

The second factor in successful blueberry growing is to prep the soil. Blueberries need acidic soil, so adding peat moss to the soil before planting can help. Mulching with oak leaves or pine needles can also help maintain the acid soil. You can also acidify the soil ahead of time with soil sulfur. This takes a bit of time so sulfur should be added now for spring planting.

When planting, space the bushes 3 to 5 feet apart (depending on variety) and cut out any dead or spindly branches. Any flowers should be picked off the first couple of years to allow the bushes to get established. After the third year you can start harvesting fruit. You will most likely have to net a few weeks before harvest to keep birds out of the fruit.

To maintain plants, water regularly and fertilize with an acidic fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate. After plants start fruiting you will need to prune some of the older branches out each year. You do not want any branches to be more than 5 or 6 years old as the older wood does not produce fruit. Main branches should be kept to less than 8 for older bushes and under 6 for younger ones.

To learn more about growing blueberries see the UC California Garden Web at <http://ucanr.edu/sites/gardenweb/berries/?uid=24&ds=466>

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.