



Blueberries

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Ideal Growing Conditions:

Blueberries need acid soil – a range of pH 4.8 to 5.5. They should be grown on raised beds and be allowed 25 sq. ft. per plant (5 ft. x 5 ft.). They require even moisture and good drainage – roots are very susceptible to standing water. Spring is the usual time for planting bare-root stock; containerized plants may be planted either in early fall (late September to early October) or in early spring. Blueberries benefit by being mulched to ensure even moisture and help with weed control.

To Acidify Soil: Apply 1 to 2 pounds of sulfur (do not use not crystallized sulfur) per 25 sq. ft. to the planting area well before you plan to plant and incorporate it into the soil. (In Visalia, it may only take 1 pound; in some of the out-lying areas a full 2 pounds may be required to lower the pH sufficiently). You will probably need to add more sulfur every third year. If you plan to grow blueberries and live in an area with hard water, you should be aware that hard water used for irrigation has a negative impact on pH. It would probably be a good idea to test your water with litmus paper.

Recommended Varieties for this Area:

Misty and *Sharpblue* are both the most productive varieties and have good plant vigor. *South* and *Reveille* are the best tasting, and *Star* produces the largest berries. Even though most blueberry varieties are self pollinating, they will yield more consistently with another variety to cross-pollinate.

Planting:

Because blueberries are shallow-rooted, the planting hole must be wide. Bare-root plants should have one-to two-thirds of the branch length removed to have a good balance with the root system. This reduces transpiration and increases chances of plant survival. There is no need to prune branches of container plants. Any flower buds should be rubbed off to ensure that the plant's energy is directed into vegetative growth.

Pests and Diseases:

Blueberries in small plantings have few, if any, pest or disease problems. Birds cause the biggest problem for blueberries in backyards so, if you want to enjoy the fruits of your labors, you should plan to net your plants.

Time to Maturity:

It takes two to three years for blueberries to establish and mature. Commercial plantings are not harvested until the third or fourth growing season.

Resources: Manuel Jimenez, UCCE Small Crops Advisor, Tulare County "Blueberries"- Publication of UC Davis Small Farm Center
