

Site Selection

Early season blueberry production requires a mild winter climate combined with low-chill varieties and frost protection. Many of the mildest winter areas are near the ocean where the moderating effects of the mass of water minimize wide fluctuations in temperature. The site will ideally be frost-free or have a threat of frost only rarely and for short periods. In other cases as with production in protected high tunnel structures, the plastic covering will provide some temperature gain and provide additional protection against frost and wind.



Planting on a hillside will also allow cold air to drain away from the crop on clear, cold nights with the potential for frosts. Sites with good air circulation will also enable mixing of cold air near the surface with warmer air higher off the ground.



Orienting the planting on hillsides facing the winter sun also allows earlier warming and more heat unit accumulation during the fall to spring cooler periods. Additional protection against frost may be aided by overhead sprinklers or fans that mix the air.

High winds cause stress during blueberry establishment, and wind later causes scratches and blisters on developing fruit from nearby leaves and branches. Plants in windy areas will not reach the same levels of vigor and productivity as plants in calmer areas or plants protected by windbreaks.

Blueberries can be grown successfully on a range of soil types, but generally speaking very heavy slow to drain clay soils are more problematic. Sandy soils are better aerated, drain



freely and do not store water as well as the heavier soil types, so they will benefit from organic matter addition in the form of compost or well weathered manure and will require more frequent irrigation. The clay soil types require the formation of high beds and incorporation of large amounts of wood waste, sawdust, or rice hulls to improve aeration and drainage.

The selected site should also have access to sufficient water volume to meet the peak irrigation or frost protection needs of the crop and with water quality parameters for acceptable production (see irrigation section).

The growing site should also have access to cooling and packing facilities and markets with road access and infrastructure to move the crop quickly and efficiently, and also complete planting and pruning labor at other times of the year.

