



## GROWING BLUEBERRIES IN EL DORADO COUNTY

The Southern High Bush Blueberry is a hybrid of native North American blueberries, which grow wild. The southern high bush was specifically hybridized for superior fruit, soil adaptability, heat tolerance, and low winter chilling. This makes them suitable for most areas of California, including our county. We also carry the Northern High Bush, which is another excellent choice for our county and places that have very cold winters.

SEASON	NORTHERN High Bush	SOUTHERN High Bush	Lowbush	Rabbiteye
Early	Blueray	Jubilee O'Neal Sharpblue		
Mid	Bluecrop	Southmoon Jubilee Jewel Emerald JellyBean (Hybrid) Peach Sorbet(Hybrid)		
Late	Elliot		Top Hat	Pink Lemonade

For blueberry lovers, allow two plants per family member. Plants can be planted as individual specimens or 2 ½-3 feet apart for a hedge. It all depends on how much you prune and how dense of a shrub row you want to establish. Most blueberry varieties are self-pollinating, but the berries will be larger and more prolific if two varieties are planted together. Blueberries prefer full-sun, but in our hot area they need some protection from the west sun in the afternoon. Blueberries ripen at different stages as well. Choose a variety from each Early, Mid, and Late season ripeners to have a longer harvest.

### Planting in Containers (highly recommended)

The potting mix should be acidic (pH 4.5-5.5), high in organic matter, and well drained. *Gardener and Bloom Acid Planting Mix* is a good choice. After planting, keep the soil moist and mulch with bark, or Peat Moss. Add more mulch each year to replenish what decomposes. Use a soil test kit or pH test kit yearly to ensure that you are in the correct range. Add soil sulfur twice a year (spring and fall) to lower pH. Good soil recipe is 1/3 Acid Planting Mix, 1/3 Small Bark, 1/3 Potting Soil.

### Planting in the Ground

Blueberries can be planted in the ground as well. The plants require abundant light and good air circulation, so select your site accordingly. Work up a planting area 2 ½ feet in diameter and one foot deep. Remove 1/3 to 1/2 of the soil. Add an equal amount of acid planting mix, or 1/3 soil- 1/3 small bark - 1/3 acid mix, and mix well. Mound slightly. Mulching with bark, or acid compost works well to conserve moisture. If the soil is poor or doesn't drain well, raised beds are effective. Most soil will require some amendments to maintain acidity. Soil sulfur twice per

year will help maintain correct low pH. A soil test kit or pH test kit is helpful in checking to see if you have the correct pH.

### Pruning

It is important to prune blueberry bushes and reduce the number of flowers and developing fruit in order to improve berry size and hasten development. In the first year, allow plants to get well established by pinching off flower buds. Successful pruning is done during dormancy, just before spring.

1. Remove low growth around the base. If it doesn't grow up, prune it out.
2. Remove dead wood and non-vigorous twiggy wood. Keep bright colored wood with long laterals. Remove blotchy brown colored stems, short growth.
3. If 1/3 of the wood has not been removed during the above steps, thin out fruiting laterals and small branches until this balance has been obtained.
4. As you prune, notice the difference between the two types of dormant buds. The fruit buds are round and plump. The small, pointed buds grow into shoots.
5. As plants get older, prune to select 4-6 bright colored, erect canes per bush. Prune older canes in October down to a height of 6"-8".

### Mulching, Fertilizing, & Water

- Since blueberry roots are near the surface, they should never be cultivated. Instead, mulch with an acid forming material such as shredded bark, pine needles, peat moss, oak leaves, or oak bark chips to a depth of six inches.
- Blueberries like acid fertilizers such as *Gardener and Bloom Rhododendron, Azalea, Camellia* , or EB Stone Cottonseed Meal.
- **Do not use nitrogen in a nitrate form.**
- **DO apply Soil Sulfur spring and summer to help keep pH down.**
- For new planted stock, use 2 tablespoons of organic *Gardener and Bloom Starter or Bud n Bloom* fertilizer in late spring or once plants are established. Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- For organic fertilizers, cottonseed meal is good as it helps lower pH. Avoid fresh manures.
- Blueberries are very sensitive to over-fertilization. Fertilize after leaves develop (around March 15<sup>th</sup>) through August. **Do not fertilize during other times of the year.**
- Blueberries like water. We suggest 4 gallons, twice a week, during the first two growing seasons and during fruit development each year. To conserve water: after harvest, water the plants once per week in the absence of rain. Stop water in early autumn to help plants harden off (toughen up) for the winter.



### Yields

Each bush will yield around three to eight quarts of blueberries. If you allow them to ripen so that there is no tinge of red showing on the fruit, they will be sweeter. They should pull off easily.

### Critters

Birds love blueberries, so use a piece of bird netting or place several pieces of red/silver mylar bird scare tape hanging randomly from each bush once berries start to ripen, not before. You

must change the position of the tape every 3 days so the birds don't become accustomed to its movements and position. Better yet, build a cage of aviary wire around them. It's War!