

## Growing Blueberries

### Why?

- Edible berries: eat fresh, pies & other desserts, or freeze, dry or can them for use later
- Fruiting season extends from late June through September
- Highbush blueberries are deciduous shrubs living 40-50 years
- Attractive plants: white or pink blossoms in spring, colorful fall foliage, and attractive bark in winter.

### Selecting a cultivar

- Plant more than one cultivar: Cross-pollination produces larger berries & lengthen harvest season
- Examples of the blueberries grown in home gardens include (in order of ripening) Duke, Earliblue, Spartan, Patriot, Bluecrop, Jersey, Blueray, Legacy, Chandler and Elliot.

### Selecting a site

- Sunny location: Avoid areas surrounded by trees that compete for water and nutrients, and interfere with air movement around the plants.

### Preparing the soil

- Acid soil of pH 4.5-5.5 is ideal; test your soil to determine pH and lower pH with sulfur as needed
- Improve drainage and add organic matters such as Douglas-fir sawdust or bark,

### Establishing your planting

- Time: Plant healthy 2-year-old plants in October or March through April.
- How: Set plants no more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch deeper than they were grown in the container. Tamp soil lightly to remove air pockets and water thoroughly. To encourage root growth, prune off flower buds in year one, and reduce fruit production in year 2.

### Weed control

- Keep at least a 4-foot area around the plants free of weeds during the growing season.
- Blueberries have shallow roots. To prevent damage, keep cultivation very shallow and not too close to the plant.

### Mulching

- Mulch keeps the soil cool, conserves moisture, suppresses weeds, adds organic matter, and improves soil structure and acidity.
- After planting, apply a mulch of Douglas-fir sawdust or bark to a depth of 2 to 3 inches.
- Increase the depth of the mulch to 6 inches over a period of years.
- You may have to apply 25 percent more nitrogen fertilizer on mulched plantings, depending on how fresh the sawdust. Fresh sawdust "ties up" nitrogen while it decomposes, so you need to add more for the plants.

### Fertilizing

- Types: ammonium sulfate, Rhododendron fertilizer, urea

- Application: Sprinkle the fertilizer evenly within 12 to 18 inches of each plant not directly on the crown or stems. The following chart explains the fertilizer usage using ammonium sulfate.  
Planting year: 1 oz of ammonium sulfate per plant in late April, repeat in early June and in late July.  
Year 2: 1.2 oz of ammonium sulfate per plant in April, May and June.  
Year 3: 1.4 oz of ammonium sulfate per plant in April, May and June.  
Year 4 & thereafter: 4 oz of ammonium sulfate per plant in April, May and June

### Watering

- Blueberry roots are close to the surface: they need an adequate water supply from blossom until the fall rains arrive. Drip irrigation or another form of under-canopy irrigation is ideal.

### Pruning

- Time: Every winter, after the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, January to early March
- How: Remove old wood; promote the growth of strong, new wood and to maintain good fruit production.

The following step by step system will make pruning easier:

1. Cut out any wood that's dead, damaged, or diseased
2. Remove whips smaller than pencil size in diameter, but leave larger whips to develop into good fruiting wood
3. Cut out one or two old, unproductive canes. Fourth-year or older wood with small, weak growth is unproductive. Cut these canes back to the ground or to a strong new whip growing near the base.
4. Remove excess whips and weak, twiggy wood, especially from the top of the plant, to allow light to reach the center.
5. Some plants do not produce many whips from the base of the plant. Instead they produce whips higher up on an old cane. These bushes will have fewer canes at the base but more new growth or renewal wood higher up on the bush. Follow the same principles described above.

### Pests

- Birds: Scare tactics have limited effectiveness; netting built on frames over plants will effectively deter the birds.
- In general, insects and diseases are not a big problem for blueberries. Possible problems are *Botrytis*, *Pseudomonas*, mummyberry, root weevils and scale.

### OSU Extension Service resources

Visit your OSU Extension Service office at 200 Warner-Milne Road, Oregon City, for these publications, or get them online at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/ec>

*Growing Blueberries in your home garden* EC 1304

*Blueberry Cultivars for Oregon* EC 1308

*Pruning Highbush Blueberries* (video)

*Sustainable Gardening Handbook* EM 8742

### For Master Gardener advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas Co), 503-725-2300 (Washington Co), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County)
- Visit Clackamas Chapter Master Gardeners website [www.clackamascountymastergardeners.org](http://www.clackamascountymastergardeners.org) for 10-Minute University handouts
- Look for Master Gardeners at area Farmer's Market