



## **TIPS FOR GROWING BLUEBERRIES**

### **Blueberry. An all round good garden plant**

The fruit can be eaten raw or cooked and contains high levels of antioxidants, so good for your health.

The flowers are attractive white or pink bell shaped and fragrant too.

Although most are deciduous many give very good autumn and winter colour in both leaves and stems.

### **Choosing your Blueberry**

It is always preferable to grow two different varieties together or in close proximity. The reason for this is to improve pollination so increasing yield.

There are very many varieties of Blueberries available now.

Early cropping, July: - Duke and Patriot

Mid season, Late July to August: - Bluecrop and Sunshine Blue.

### **Growing Conditions**

The secret to growing Blueberries is to provide a light open free draining soil which is acidic, (a pH of 4.5-5.5) most ericaceous composts are ideal. A sandy or peaty soil that has the correct pH level would be good but heavy clay or chalky soil would not. If you have the later type of soil all is not lost as you can grow them in containers using the correct soil/compost.

Your soil should have plenty of organic matter incorporated but not be high in plant food.

There is a symbiosis between a particular fungus and the functioning of the roots of the blueberry plant. The fungi reside in peat so peat is an essential element in the growing of Blueberries.

It is essential that whether they are grown in containers or in the open ground they must have a steady supply of water all summer when all stages of their growth takes place. Rain water is best but if you have to use tap water, which is often alkaline, then the plants will need feeding with acidic fertilisers.

Using plant foods such as Seaweed plus Sequestered Iron or Miracle-gro Ericaceous feed will help to ensure good plant health, but take care not to over feed.

## **Planting**

You can plant blueberries almost at any time of the year from container grown plants.

If they are to go into open ground prepare the position; (see **Growing Conditions**).

Plant them out 1-1.5 meter apart ensuring that the pot has been watered well first.

Water in well and use an acidic mulch such as moss peat, composted bark, pine needles, leaf mould or cocoa shell.

After planting, remove all the round fat flower buds to put all the energies into forming a good supportive framework of stems. The second year most of the flower buds should also be removed. This will produce a very healthy and bushy plant that can support an abundance of fruit.

## **Pruning**

Before pruning it is important to understand on which kind of wood fruit is produced. The largest fruit is produced on the tips of one year old shoots, whereas the greatest quantity of fruit is produced on the short side shoots of older wood.

When pruning is required it is best done in the winter and is similar in method to the pruning of Black Currants. Pruning should encourage new strong growth while retaining fruit producing older wood.

First, prune out all dead, diseased, damaged, crossing, weak growth, stems that are too close to the ground aiming to keep the centre open.

When the bush is three years old start to remove one or two of the less productive stems to ground level. Thereafter remove about a quarter of old main stems each year.

## **Pest and Disease**

They are generally free of most pests and diseases, suffering only from the depredation caused by animals and birds.

Netting against these attacks is the best protection.

They can suffer from frost damage if they come into growth and suffer from a late frost. To protect against these late frosts a double layer of fleece can be used.