



# BLUEBERRIES

## **Site planning**

Highbush blueberries crave full sun and well-drained gravelly/sandy soil. Their roots are very fine and can't penetrate clay easily. Damp soil is one of the main reasons for failure with blueberry plants! They also need acidic soil to thrive - a pH of 4.5-5.5 is ideal. If you don't know the pH of your soil, you can purchase kits to test it at garden centers or take a soil sample to the NB Department of Agriculture to be tested. If your soil is over 5.5 you can use iron sulfate (iron chelate) as well as mulching with pine needles to help lower your soil pH.

## **Planting**

When digging your planting holes (5-6' apart) make the hole bigger than needed to help loosen up the soil for the roots. If your soil is very gravelly/sandy mix peat moss into the soil to help retain nutrients. Mix it WELL into the soil, ensuring there is no more than 25% peat moss as it will draw water away from the roots and when wet will stay soggy. Blueberries are shallow-rooted plants. When planting, place the root ball at the same depth as in the pot. Be sure to water well after planting and water as needed during the dry season. Mulch with bark mulch or pine needles to help retain water. Don't keep the ground soggy - ensure it has time to dry between waterings! Blood meal can be used as a source of nitrogen. Bonemeal and compost aren't advised as they raise the PH of the soil.

## **Pruning**

Blueberries are slower to get established so they need little care their first few years. Once established remove crossed limbs and eliminate old/dead/damaged stems low to stimulate new growth from the base of the shrub. Their fruiting buds are located in the outermost 2-3 inches of stem growth so DON'T shape them like an ornamental shrub as you will remove all the flower buds. Proper pruning maintains an open growth habit, which improves air circulation, opens the center of the plant to sunlight, and reduces disease.

## **Harvesting**

Ripe blueberries are plump and deep blue with a dusting of gray on the surface. A blueberry that is firm or shows any hint of red isn't fully ripened and will likely be tart. White and green colored blueberries are not ripe yet - leave them on the bush!