

Blueberries for Vitamin C

A healthy addition to your garden

Quoting Clive Blaze of the Diggers Club in Victoria: "Blueberries have the highest antioxidant levels, gram for gram, of any fruit. Expensive in the shops, but with a little bit of effort they are perfect for the home food garden" The shrubs grow to about 1.5 metres tall. Blueberries take up to four years to reach full production. The creamy-white flowers appear on one-year-old wood followed by the fruit with beautiful autumn leaf colour.

Planting: Blueberries prefer at least 8 hours of sunlight a day in a well-drained acidic soil. Acidity can be increased with the addition of rotted leaves or pine needles and garden compost. The drainage of heavy clay soils can be improved with the addition of **Multicrop Ground Breaker**, a liquid soil conditioner applied to the planting hole. If drainage is a problem plant on a raised bed. Plant 1-1.5 metres apart. Blueberries can be planted in association with other acid loving plants such as Azalea, Daphne or Pieris.

Mulching: Blueberries have a shallow root system and mulching is essential to retain moisture during the heat of summer. Keep mulch away from the stem of plants.

Fertilising: When first planted and during the first few months the application of **Maxicrop Seaweed Plant Nutrient** will encourage strong root growth. I also recommend **Multicrop EcoFish**, a natural organic liquid fertiliser and **Neutrog Seamungus**. This is a pelletized seaweed and chook poo (from free-range hens) organic fertilizer.

Watering: Plants must not be allowed to dry out, particularly during spring when flowers and fruit are forming and during the heat of summer. The ideal method of watering is by drip irrigation with an in-line dripper such as **DripEze** available from irrigation companies.

Pollination: Blueberries are self-pollinating.

Pruning: The fruit is borne on the previous season's growth with vigorous wood producing the most fruit. Regularly remove any dead or spindly growth. Heavy pruning is not usually required for the first four years. Pruning in the first four years for shaping and to encourage a strong bush should only take place during dormancy in winter.

Fruit: Picking the fruit usually takes place in late December. Pick the fruit about a week after the berries turn blue. The fruit holds well after picking and can be frozen for storage without blanching or other special treatment.

Pests & diseases: Birds love the fruit so netting must be considered. They are largely disease free. Sometimes, depending on weather conditions, mildew may be a problem rectified with a fungal spray. Always follow the manufacturer's directions on chemicals.

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